DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 920 SO 030 783

AUTHOR	Casino, Eric S.; Schelander, Bjorn, Ed.
TITLE	Burma and the Burmese: A Historical Perspective.
INSTITUTION	Hawaii Univ., Honolulu. Center for Southeast Asian Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	121p.; "With illustrations by Ann Hsu."
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for Southeast Asian Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 1890 East-West Road, Moore Hall 412, Honolulu, HI 96822.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Learner (051) -- Historical Materials (060)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Area Studies; *Asian History; Asian Studies; *Burmese Culture; Foreign Countries; Global Education; Instructional Materials; Multicultural Education; *Non Western Civilization; Secondary Education; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS	*Burma

ABSTRACT

An overview of Burma's history and culture is discussed in this learning guide. The book begins with a geographical study of Asia's major land masses, archipelagoes, and the bodies of water that have made possible the movement of trade, religion, and culture from ancient to modern times. The early history of Burma's culture is discussed through temples, kings and kingdoms, religions, dynasties, and wars to the more current transformation of Burma from a colony to a nation. Concepts and teachings of Buddhism and Buddhism in daily life, along with the sangha and the Shwedagon Pagoda, are given. A section is devoted to the discussion of Burma after gaining independence and includes information about foreign relations, civilian to military rule, economic development and the military, the socialist republic, and the continuing struggle between the military successors of Ne Win and the pro-democracy movement. Each chapter provides multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks, creative writing problems, class discussion, and suggestions for further research. Chapters include: (1) "Land and People"; (2) "From Past to Present"; (3) "Religion"; (4) "Life and Culture"; and (5) "Burma after Independence." The book contains answer keys to chapter exercises and a 26-item bibliography. (BT)

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BURMA AND THE BURMESE

A Historical Perspective

by Eric S. Casino

edited by Bjorn Schelander

Florence
Lamoreux

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Center for Southeast Asian Studies

School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies

University of Hawai'i

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Partially funded by the U.S. Department of Education

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July 1997

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PREFACE

In 1989, following the rise to power of the new regime, the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), the official name of the Union of Burma was changed to Union of Myanmar. Many place names were either given new spellings to correct British mistransliterations or replaced by their pre-colonial era names. For example Pagan was replaced by Bagan, Rangoon by Yangon, and Maymyo by Pyin Oo Lwin. However, these new names are not widely used outside (or, for some, inside) the country, and most recent literature has retained the old names and spellings. Hence, to avoid confusion, the old names and spellings will also be retained in this text (including the terms "Burma," "Burman," and "Burmese"). It should be noted that specialists on Burma make an important distinction between "Burman" and "Burmese." The term Burmese refers to all the people who are citizens of the Union of Burma (Myanmar). In contrast, Burman refers specifically to the ethnic group that makes up the majority of the population of Burma and does not include the other ethnic groups and tribal peoples living in the hill and border areas of the country.

For additional research in libraries and computerized sources, students should consult references under both Myanmar and Burma.

CHAPTER ONE

LAND AND PEOPLE

Geography

The best way to understand Burma's geography is to start with a large-scale view of Asia -- its major land masses, its archipelagoes, and the bodies of water that have made possible the movement of trade, religion, and culture from ancient to modern times.

Burma has a strategic location between the Indian subcontinent and China, that is between South Asia and East Asia. The region between India and China has been called Indo-China by some Western geographers, because it was here that the two great civilizations of met. Another more modern name for it is Southeast Asia, which accurately describes this area lying between South and East Asia.

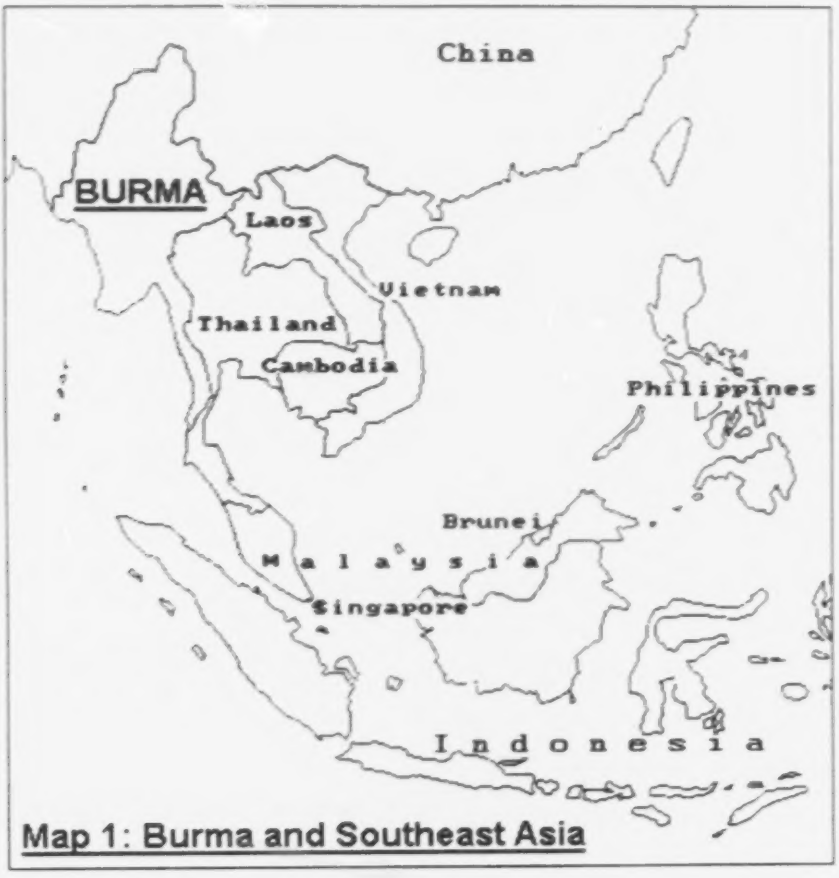
India, China, and Indo-China are tied together by a system of mighty rivers flowing southeastward from Tibet and the Himalayan mountain masses. The Yang-Tze River of China and the Brahmaputra River of eastern India both derive their waters from the Himalayas, as do Vietnam's Red River, Thailand's Chao Phraya River, Burma's Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers, and the Mekong River, which flows through Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. These rivers, with their corresponding watersheds and valleys, have both helped and hindered the movements of hunters, farmers, and armies, and determined the divisions of kingdoms, colonies, and the drawing of national boundaries.

Southeast Asia is divided into two parts, Mainland Southeast Asia and Island Southeast Asia. The latter consists of the major island chains known as the Indonesian and the Philippine archipelagoes. The mainland nations of Southeast Asia are Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Mainland Southeast Asia is surrounded by two large bodies of water, the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. These two bodies of water are separated by the Malay Peninsula, a long, narrow strip of land extending southward from the lower parts of Burma and Thailand toward Indonesia. Modern Singapore occupies the island just off the tip of the Malay Peninsula. In ancient times, most traders between India and China sailed from the South China Sea to the Bay of Bengal and vice versa around this peninsula through the Strait of Malacca. Occasionally some traders chose a shortcut by sailing directly to the narrowest part of the peninsula, the Isthmus of Kra, where they would carry their goods overland to the other side of the peninsula and continue again by sea to their final destination.

Most early shipping between the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal passed through the Strait of Malacca and up the coast of Burma. The early traders often preferred to follow the coast for reasons of increased safety and access to further trade and supplies, and they seldom chose the more direct but dangerous route that led straight across the sea to their destinations in India. Thus Burma has benefited from the international trade that has been conducted in Southeast Asia since ancient times. During the heyday of the British colonial empire in Asia, Burma's products enriched the regional trade that linked Calcutta, Malacca, Singapore, Brunei, and Hong Kong.

Burma's immediate neighbors to the west and northwest are India and Bangladesh. To the north and northeast is China. Thailand and Laos border Burma on the east and southeast. Cambodia and Vietnam lie further to the east; while Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia are situated further to the southeast of Burma. The bodies of water immediately off the coast of Burma are the Gulf of Martaban to the east and the Andaman Sea to the south, both of which merge with the Bay of Bengal. The Burmese portion of the upper Malay Peninsula faces the Andaman Sea, and is known as the Tenasserim Coast. The opposite side of the upper peninsula faces the Gulf of Siam and belongs to Thailand, while the entire lower portion of the peninsula is occupied by Malaysia.



Map 1: Burma and Southeast Asia

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The geography of Burma is dominated by broad lowlands surrounded on three sides by highlands. The country has an area of 261,789 square miles (676,577 square kilometers), a little smaller than the state of Texas and a little larger than the combined size of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. It is the largest of the countries of Mainland Southeast Asia, and is more than twice the size of Vietnam or Malaysia.

Burma is blessed by having three major rivers flowing through its territory. The main river, the Irrawaddy, rises from the northern uplands and winds south through the heart of the country to the Bay of Bengal. The Chindwin River starts from the northwest and becomes a tributary of the Irrawaddy in central Burma. To the east and parallel to the Irrawaddy, is the Salween River, which flows through the valleys of the Shan Plateau and empties into the Gulf of Martaban. These rivers have been an important source of irrigation throughout the central portion of Burma, and the rich soil of the wide Irrawaddy river delta region has allowed the development of an extremely productive system of rice cultivation.

As it approaches the sea, the Irrawaddy River fans out into eight branches, forming the wide delta region of Lower Burma. This delta area covers 13,000 square miles, and its rich alluvial deposits make it excellent for rice cultivation. The capital city of Rangoon (Yangon) is situated on the delta along the left bank of the Rangoon River, which is formed by a tributary of the Irrawaddy. The Irrawaddy has long served as a major means of communication and transport linking the lower and upper parts of the Burmese heartland: it is the route that Kipling referred to as "the road to Mandalay."

Burma is defined not only by these rivers but also by the mountains and highlands of Upper Burma, and the contrasting climates of the dry interior of Upper Burma, known as the Dry Zone, and the wet deltas of Lower Burma. The mountains and uplands form a semi-circle around Burma's agricultural heartland. In the northern part of the country Burma is the home to Southeast Asia's highest mountain, Mt. Hkakaborazi (19,296 feet).

Map 2: Burma

The People

Burma is home to more than one hundred different ethnic groups whose histories are linked to the broader ethnic history of Asia. The total population of Burma is currently estimated at about 43 million. All the people of Burma are called Burmese, but Burmans are the largest

single group, making up more than 65 percent of the population. They have traditionally lived in the central region of Upper Burma, where the major Burmese kingdoms flourished.

The two other largest groups are the Mons and the Shans. The Mons, who are related to the Khmers of Cambodia, are sometimes called Mon-Khmers, and live in the delta region and along the Tenasserim Coast in Lower Burma. The Shans, who are closely related to the T'ai people of Thailand, live in the eastern Shan plateau and mountain valleys bordering Thailand. They call themselves Tai, though the Burmans refer to them as Shan. Some of the other major groups are the Karens and Kayahs, who live in the eastern hills and mountains, and the Chin and Kachin peoples, whose traditional home is in the northern highlands. The Rakhines are from Arakan in western Burma bordering Bangladesh. Smaller groups include the Danu, Lahu, Lashi, Lisu, Padaung, Palaung, Wa, and Yaw. The Salon, also known as Sea Gypsies, live on some of the 800 islands that form the Mergui archipelago off the Tenasserim coast.

Burmese ethnic groups differ from each other in terms of their social structure, language, culture, and adaptation to the local environment. Although there are many languages spoken in Burma, Burmese (Myanmar) is the official language. There are religious differences among the various ethnic groups as well. Most Burmans and Shans are Buddhist, while many of the upland peoples are Christian. Several of the main distinctions between Burmans and many of the other ethnic groups in Burma, however, have developed because of their adaptations to the different geographic environments of the broad lowland regions and the hilly, forested highlands.

The contrast between the peoples of the central plains and the upland peoples or "hill tribes" is characteristic of many Southeast Asian countries. In the lowlands, navigable rivers and

Map 3: Burma

their tributaries provide abundant water for irrigation systems in the lowlands as well as ready access to trade goods brought in to coastal ports and shipped upriver. Hence, the lowlanders are primarily agriculturists practicing intensive wet-rice cultivation on large tracts of land using sophisticated irrigation systems developed over many centuries.

In contrast, the forested highlands are dry, with little arable land. The upland people traditionally relied on a mixture of hunting, gathering, and dry-rice farming in small, temporary forest clearings, using a method called "slash-and-burn" or swidden cultivation. The farmers clear a small plot of land in the forest by cutting and burning the trees and underbrush. They then plant their crops with ash serving as a fertilizer to the fields. The same fields may be used for several cycles of harvest and planting. However, swidden fields cannot be used permanently because the top soil is quickly leached of nutrients and washed away by heavy seasonal rains. After a few years, the farmers abandon their swidden field, and move to a new area of the forest to begin a new cycle of clearing and planting. Swidden cultivation is still practiced today.

These two contrasting environments have affected both population size and political organization. Powerful kingdoms arose in the lowlands because resources were more plentiful and the land could support more people. Chiefs and rulers organized social and economic life for the growing population and provided protection for farmers, skilled craftspeople and traders so that they could produce and distribute the food and material goods the society needed. The forested highlands, because of the relative scarcity of arable land, could not easily support large populations, and the people living there tended to be organized into smaller tribal groups or families that were somewhat isolated from each other. The mountainous terrain also made access difficult, so trading was limited.

Generally, the various non-Burman ethnic groups, including the so-called hill tribes, were governed by their own hereditary rulers. These rulers, however, usually maintained a tributary relationship with the powerful kingdoms of central Burma. They paid allegiance to the court by giving gifts or tributes and by making marriage and military alliances. Through these and other methods they acknowledged the superior power of the central kingdom in return for its protection.

Burmese Fishermen

The Cycle of Climate and Agriculture

Burma has a tropical climate with two main seasons: a wet, rainy season from mid-May through October when the monsoon brings abundant daily rain to the delta region of Lower Burma; and a dry season of little or no rainfall from November through mid-May. The dry season brings cool, sometimes crisp weather from November through the end of February, especially in the highlands where temperatures can drop quite low. By March it becomes hot and dusty. As the monsoon season approaches, the weather becomes increasingly hot and humid until the monsoon breaks. The Dry Zone in the interior of Upper Burma does not receive as much rain as the delta, but the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers bring abundant water to the area.

Burma's major agricultural crops are rice, beans and pulses (leguminous crops such as peas, beans and lentils), chilies, and edible oils (sesame, sunflower). Other local crops include tobacco, tea, cotton, and jute. A large variety of tropical fruits is available, and visitors may be surprised to find that strawberries are also grown, having been introduced by the British.

Rice farming in Burma depends on irrigation systems and the yearly monsoon season flooding of the major rivers. The flooding of the delta region provides the fields with a rich sediment that makes the area extremely fertile. During the first half of this century, Burma was the world's greatest exporter of rice. However, after independence production dropped and rice exports are still less than a quarter of their pre-World War II levels.

Burma produces a tremendous variety of fish products including fresh and dried fish, fresh and dried prawns, shrimps, and *ngapi* (Burmese fish paste). Its vast reserves of tropical timber, including teak, are highly sought after.

Rubies, Sapphires and Jade

Burma is famous for its gemstones, especially rubies, sapphires, and jade. Burmese rubies are the most prized of all, in particular those called "pigeon's blood" because of their vibrant red color. The town of Mogok, in Upper Burma just north of Mandalay, is the main center of ruby and sapphire mining and has produced gemstones for the past 800 years. The deep green jade of Burma, known as Imperial jade, is sometimes mistaken for emeralds because of it brilliant color and clarity.

Twice each year, the government of Burma holds a gem fair attended by gem merchants and jewelers from all over the world. These modern-day fairs follow a tradition started in the days of ancient Burmese kings, when foreign traders and merchants, including Europeans, flocked to the country to acquire the precious and beautiful rubies, sapphires, jade and countless other gemstones that are mined in Burma. Cultivated pearls are also available.

One of the earliest European visitors to Mogok, Ludovico de Varthema, who went there in 1505, is reported to have said, "the sole merchandise of this people is jewels." French gem merchants visiting the Burmese court were asked to assess the value of Mogok rubies and were so awestruck that they could only pronounce them "priceless."

Burma also has a wealth of mineral resources, including oil and natural gas. Other such resources include tin, lead, silver, and zinc. In addition, marble is quarried in the western part of the country.

Political Geography

Burma's flag contains a ring of fourteen stars symbolizing each of the major administrative units of the country, the seven states and seven divisions. The divisions occupy most of the central region and the Tenasserim coast, while the states are home to many of the ethnic minorities.

STATES	DIVISIONS
Arakan	Rangoon
Chin	Mandalay
Kachin	Magwe
Karen	Sagaing
Kayah	Pegu
Shan	Irrawaddy
Mon	Tenasserim

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

I. Map Study: Indicate the location of each of the following by writing its number on the map.

1. Irrawaddy River
2. Chindwin River
3. Malay Peninsula
4. Arakan State
5. Mergui Archipelago
6. Gulf of Siam
7. Tenasserim Coast
8. Bay of Bengal
9. Andaman Sea
10. Rangoon (city)
11. Mandalay (city)
12. Shan Plateau

II. Multiple Choice:

Circle the letter that indicates the correct answer

1. Burma is situated in

   (a) East Asia (b) South Asia

   (c) North Asia (d) Southeast Asia

2. The main river that flows through Central Burma is

   (a) Chindwin River (b) Sittang River

   (c) Irrawaddy River (d) Salween River

3. The western border of Burma is closest to

   (a) India (b) Malaysia

   (c) Thailand (d) Indonesia

4. The most productive wet-rice agriculture is found in

   (a) the dry zone (b) the delta region

   (c) in the highlands of western Burma (d) west of Central Burma

5. The population of Burma is about

   (a) 23 million (b) 33 million

   (c) 43 million (d) 53 million

6. The total area of Burma is about

   (a) 161,000 square miles (b) 261,000 square miles

   (c) 361,000 square miles (d) 461,000 square miles

7. The major ethnic group of Burma is

(a) the Shans (b) the Burmans

(c) the Karen (d) the Mons

8. Burma is well known as an exporter of this tropical hardwood:

(a) bamboo (b) teak

(c) pine (d) mangrove

9. Which of the following countries does **not** share a border with Burma?

(a) Laos (b) China

(c) Thailand (d) Vietnam

10. Compared with pre-war levels, Burma's current rice exports are

(a) substantially smaller (b) substantially larger

(c) about the same. (d) non-existent

III Fill in the Blanks

1. Burma lies within _____ Southeast Asia, while some of its more distant neighbors, such as Indonesia, lie within Island Southeast Asia.

2. Much of Burma's agriculture relies on water provided by the major river systems, which include the Irrawaddy river and its tributary, the _____ river of central and northwestern Burma.

3. Burma's capital, Rangoon, lies on one of the eight branches of the Irrawaddy that form Lower Burma's _____ region.

4. The Mons are related to the _____ ethnic group of Cambodia.

5. The Shan of Burma call themselves the _____.

6. The main religion of Burma is _____.

7. One of the main centers of Burmese gemstone production is _____.

8. The eastern part of the upper Malay peninsula belongs to Thailand, while the western part, known as the _____ coast, belongs to Burma.

9. The two neighbors on Burma's western border are India and _____.

10. Some upland communities practice swidden, also known as _____ agriculture.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Early History

The origins of Burma's people are hidden in the shadowy mist of prehistory. Stone tools have been found in the region that date back to more than 4000 B.C., while other evidence indicates that metal tools were made by around the year 2000 B.C. Burma's early inhabitants were hunters and gatherers who lived off the fruits of trees and the roots of plants, the fish in the rivers, and the birds and animals of the forest. However, little more is known of these inhabitants, and after 1000 B.C. there is a gap in the archeological record which gives little or no indication of what may have happened to these people.

However, by 200 B.C. there is evidence of a more advanced civilization in which metal tools were used in the lowlands to clear forests for irrigated rice farming. This marks the beginning of what is called the Pyu period, which lasted until the ninth century. Historians do not all agree on the origins of the Pyu or on exactly when they came to Burma and how long they stayed there. However it is accepted that they originally migrated from the Tibetan area of the Himalayas into Burma, spoke a Tibeto-Burman language, and used a writing system based on an Indian script. One of the early centers of Pyu influence was Sri Ksetra ("Pleasant Field") located near the site of present day Prome.

By the ninth century, the Burmans had become a major presence on the central plains. Some scholars believe that the Pyu and the Burmans were closely related. It is not known exactly when the Burman civilization began, but tradition and later Burmese chronicles record the beginning of the first Burman dynasty, Pagan (Bagan), as early as A.D. 108. The first definite archeological evidence from Bagan dates from A.D. 849, not long after the destruction of the last Pyu city in A.D. 832. Pagan is strategically situated on the east bank of the Irrawaddy River in the heart of the central Dry Zone. There it could take advantage of the north-south river traffic, as well as the east-west trade across the river plain. Being only 300 miles up the Irrawaddy from the sea, Pagan also benefited from overseas trade. Most importantly, it was near the agricultural region of Kyaukse, the breadbasket (or, more accurately, the rice bowl) of central Burma which produced enough food to support a large population.

The first great king of Pagan known to history through stone inscriptions is Anawrahta, who ascended the throne in 1044 and is considered the founder of the Pagan empire. King Anawrahta was a man of tremendous energy, and in the thirty-three years of his reign, he brought much wealth and many resources to Pagan. He added territory to Pagan and unified smaller centers of power under Pagan's rule. His most important campaign was in 1057, when he conquered the Mon kingdom of Thaton and brought back to his capital the Theravada Buddhist scriptures written in Pali, an ancient language of India, as well as many Buddhist monks and skilled artisans and craftsmen. Mon language, literature, and traditions contributed much to the development of Burmese culture.

Temples of Pagan

King Anawrahta embraced Theravada Buddhism as the official religion of his kingdom and thus initiated the extraordinary period of temple and pagoda building that made Pagan one of the most splendid architectural achievements of the world. In little more than two centuries, Pagan and its environs were covered with thousands of pagodas, monasteries, and other religious buildings. Some two thousand of them are still standing, and the remains of thousands more can be detected. The ruins of Pagan cover an area of sixteen square miles. It is one of the richest archeological sites in Asia.

The kingdom of Pagan was arranged like a ***mandala***, that is, in concentric circles with the capital at the center. The king, his palace, and his court were at the center of the capital. He was surrounded by widening circles of territories and peoples who lived in villages, towns, and provincial capitals. The king's descriptive title was "lord of land and water" because the primary source of the kingdom's livelihood was rice, and rice farms had to be irrigated with waters from the Irrawaddy and other smaller streams in the countryside. However, land and water, though plentiful, were never sufficient to create wealth. The king also needed laborers to build dams, canals, and other devices for irrigation; farmers to plant and harvest the rice; and soldiers to protect the farms, collect taxes, and enforce royal decrees. In other words, land, water, and manpower were all necessary ingredients to insure the growth and prosperity of the Pagan kingdom. Of these three ingredients, manpower was often in the shortest supply, which explains why the Pagan kings often conquered other areas in order to bring more people into their kingdom.

Burma after Pagan

According to popular history, the Pagan dynasty came to an end because of invasions by Mongols under the leadership of Kublai Khan. While historians are not certain whether Kublai Khan actually entered Pagan and plundered and destroyed the city, it is clear that Pagan lost its power and went into decline after 1287. New centers of power were established in Ava (Innwa) and Pegu (Bago), but the Burmese did not recover their power until the Toungoo dynasty,

founded in 1486, reached its high point under the leadership of King Bayinnaung in 1551. Burma's last dynasty, the Konbaung dynasty, was founded in 1752 and ended with British annexation in 1885.

After Pagan went into decline late in the 13th century, some of the Pagan royalty tried to re-establish a new Burman capital at Ava, north of Pagan and close to present-day Mandalay. In the meantime, the unification of Upper and Lower Burma that had been achieved by the Pagan empire was lost, as various groups, including Shan and Mon, competed for power. The Shan controlled most of Upper Burma and captured Ava in 1527. Meanwhile, to the south, the Mon established a new kingdom in Pegu.

The Burmans found refuge at Toungoo, a small chiefdom near the Sittang River. Toungoo originally was only a minor principality, an outpost of Burmans fleeing from the Shans. In its early days it provided no competition for the more prosperous kingdom the Mons had established in Pegu, Lower Burma. But Toungoo was to become the home of one of the great Burmese dynasties. In 1516 a son was born to the king and queen of Toungoo: this son was to become famous for initiating the reunification Burma. Legend states that when the child was born, the royal swords and spears in the armory glowed brightly, even though surrounded by the darkness of night. This led people to believe that he would become a great warrior. The young prince was named Tabinshwehti, and he became king in 1531 while only 14 years old. He expanded his control down the Irrawaddy River and in 1539 captured the Mon kingdom at Pegu. Tabinshweti moved his capital to Pegu and began the construction of pagodas and a palace. By

proclaiming his support of Buddhism, the new king was assured of the loyalty of the monkhood and general population, who were strong believers in the merit-path to salvation.

King Tabinshwehti, like the Pagan kings before him, resumed the practice of waging wars against neighboring kingdoms in Siam (Thailand) and Laos. His armies attacked Siam and Laos in 1548-1550, but were defeated and he himself was assassinated on his return to Burma. In 1551, his brother became the second great Toungoo king, taking the name Bayinnaung. King Bayinnaung is considered the most famous of the Toungoo kings. He not only reimposed Burman authority in Lower Burma, where the Mons had earlier staged a rebellion, but brought the Shans in Upper Burma under control, thus reuniting Upper and Lower Burma. He also continued the wars against Siam and Laos started by his predecessor. King Bayinnaung succeeded in occupying the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai and the Lao city of Vientiane. Later he attacked the Siamese capital of Ayuthaya, capturing it in 1564 and again in 1569, after which it remained under his control until his death in 1581.

Bayinnaung had succeeded in expanding the Burmese kingdom in all directions, but after his death the Toungoo dynasty began to decline. Plans to conquer and annex Arakan were never carried out. .In fact, the Arakanese launched their own attack, capturing Pegu in 1599. In the period of instability that followed many rival groups tried to gain control of different parts of Lower and Upper Burma. Even foreigners were occasionally involved in this process. In 1600 a Portuguese mercenary named Felipe de Brito y Nicote established himself in Syriam, a trading port just below Rangoon. He effectively repulsed an attack by the Arakanese, and with Mon assistance he ruled over Syriam for more than a decade. In 1613 Anaukpetlun, the king of Ava,

laid siege to Syriam after already taking control of Prome and Toungoo. Felipe de Brito was forced to surrender, unaware that five Portuguese ships with reinforcements from Goa were within a few miles of the city. De Brito was impaled and four of the five Portuguese ships were captured.

The Konbaung Dynasty and Burma's Last Kings

At the time of its fall, the Toungoo dynasty had moved its capital to Ava in central Burma, near the rice supplies of Kyaukse and across the river from present-day Mandalay on the west bank of the Irrawaddy River. The restored Toungoo dynasty came to power at the beginning of the 17th century and ruled for another 150 years. With its capital at Ava, the dynasty was able to take advantage of trade both from the Bay of Bengal and northward towards China, but ultimately failed because of opposition from enemies within and abroad. In 1751 Binnya Dala, a Shan leader from Pegu, captured Ava and overthrew the last of the Toungoo kings.

After the fall of Ava to Binnya Dala, a new leader emerged in Upper Burma. He was known as Alaungpaya, a deputy to the lord of Shwebo, a small chiefdom just north of Ava. Alaungpaya was a man of great energy and force, who in 1753 marched his army up to the walls of Ava and took the city by conquest. In the contest for supremacy, Alaungpaya won over his rivals in Lower Burma and became the founder of the third and last Burmese dynasty, the Konbaung (1752-1885). Because of his great power and momentous achievements, Alaungpaya

entered history as the third of Burma's great unifying kings, after Anawrahta of Pagan and Bayinnaung of the Toungoo dynasty.

Alaungpaya consolidated his royal control by moving his army south to capture the city of Dagon, site of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. He then established a new city close by, which he named Rangoon (Yangon), which means "the end of strife." Later Rangoon became the headquarters of the British in Burma and the capital of colonial and post-colonial Burma. Alaungpaya also gained control over the Shans by capturing Chiang Mai and appointing a vassal to rule the territory.

Having imposed his dominance in the northern part of what is now Thailand, Alaungpaya was not content to limit the scope of his authority to the area of Chiang Mai. Alaungpaya looked southward to the Siamese capital at Ayuthaya, which he attacked in 1760. The siege was cut short after Alaungpaya was wounded and became ill. The Burmese army retreated from Siamese territory and Alaungpaya died in May of the same year. Alaungpaya's successor continued the Siamese campaign and sacked Ayuthaya in 1767, killing the Siamese king and looting the city. Thousands of prisoners, as well as many priceless valuables, were taken back to Burma.

The next major king of the Konbaung dynasty was Bodawpaya, the fourth son of Alaungpaya. Bodawpaya seized power and quickly eliminated his rivals and opponents, including his own brothers. He continued the policy of territorial expansion and succeeded in conquering and annexing the kingdom of Arakan, a project started by Bayinnaung during the Toungoo period. The Konbaung conquest of Arakan, like that of the Pagan conquest of Thaton, resulted in thousands of prisoners being brought back to Burma as captives. Because some

Arakanese resistance fighters were operating from within British India. Arakanese resistance to Burmese rule eventually led to British intervention in Burmese affairs.

Bodawpaya's reign is remembered for some important political accomplishments. He established a new royal capital at Amarapura, adjacent to Mandalay, and initiated a series of surveys to determine territorial boundaries, conduct a census of the population, and assess the financial resources of districts and villages for the purpose of better taxation and administration. Like all Burmese kings since Anawrahta of Pagan, he used most of the tax revenues for the construction of pagodas in order to accumulate merit and legitimize his reign.

Bodawpaya is also credited with initiating a renewed interest in the study of law, which became popular both at court and within the monasteries. The Hluttaw, or council of ministers, remained at the center of the administrative system, and orders for various public works, such as irrigation projects, were dispatched to the provinces.

The Anglo-Burmese Wars

Bodawpaya's successor continued the aggressive policy toward enemies in the frontier regions bordering India. He interfered in the political affairs of Manipur, Assam, and Bengal, and the rajah of Manipur fled to British India to seek British protection. The area of Arakan was once again taken over by the Burmese, though resistance fighters established guerrilla bases behind the border in India and continued their attacks against the Burmese overlords across the Naaf river. In retaliation for these attacks the Burmese pursued the guerrillas back to Indian

territories. The British did not like these Burmese incursions, while the Burmese in turn were angry at the British for not controlling guerrilla activities originating from districts the British were supposed to control.

The Burmese seized British East India Company workers along the border area and occupied an island in the Naaf river which formed the boundary between Burma and British Bengal. All twelve soldiers in the British garrison on the island were killed. This incident triggered the first Anglo-Burmese War. The Burmese forces pushed forward into Bengal, while the British sent a naval detachment to Rangoon, which they captured on May 10, 1824. This quickly stopped the progress of the Burmese soldiers pressing across the Indian border, and Maha Bandula, their general, was recalled to Upper Burma with instructions to recapture Rangoon. The two sides fought hard and both suffered heavy losses. In addition to battle casualties, tropical disease was a major problem: it was reported that 3,115 of the first batch of 3,586 European soldiers died of disease. Despite these losses, the British and Indian soldiers were better armed than their Burmese counterparts, and continued to advance up the Irrawaddy River. They were only 72 kilometers away from the Burmese royal capital when a ceasefire was declared.

The Burmese lost heavily. The February 1826 Treaty of Yandabo concluding the hostilities forced the Burmese to pay one million pounds; to renounce any claims they had on Manipur and Assam; and to give to the British both the Arakan coast and the Tenaserrim coast. The British were to retain control of Rangoon and the surrounding territory until the indemnity had been fully paid. The Treaty of Yandabo was a serious blow to Burmese pride.

In the interim between the first and second wars, which lasted for about 25 years (1824-1852), Burmese dynastic politics was in turmoil. Bagyidaw, who was king during the first war, began suffering from mental illness, and his brother, Tharrawaddy, took over as king in 1837. Tharrawaddy was very resentful toward the British because of the humiliation Burma had suffered at their hands, and he tried to repudiate the Treaty of Yandabo. Burmese-British relations became increasingly tense and in 1839 the British governor of India decided to close the residency and cut off formal diplomatic relations with Burma.

Tharrawaddy's reign brought much social and political upheaval for the kingdom. His son Pagon Min succeeded him in 1846 but was weak and corrupt, and could not reverse the downward spiral in which the kingdom was caught. Royal control of the outlying areas was so weak that it could no longer suppress unrest among the Shans and other minorities.

The second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852 revolved around a commercial dispute. Two British ship captains were charged with evading customs dues in the port of Rangoon. One of them was also charged with the murder of a Burmese member of his own crew. Though they were released after paying a fine, their complaints were heard by the new Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie. Determined to show that the British would not tolerate what was seen as mistreatment of its subjects by a foreign power, Dalhousie sent Commodore Lambert to Rangoon with a demand for 9,200 rupees (£1,920) to compensate the two captains. The Burmese did not provide the desired response, and soon the British demand had escalated to £100,000 and a personal apology from the king. When Lambert seized the Burmese king's royal ship in Rangoon harbor, the Burmese opened fire and the Second Anglo-Burmese War had begun.

Rangoon was the first city to fall to the British. An account from the Illustrated London News of June 26, 1852 describes the scene after the first major assault: "It was a horrid sight visiting the stockades the morning after the fire....The effect of our fire was fearful: indeed, nothing could have stood such heavy guns. But the Burmese fought with spirit till completely driven out." Within a few months the British had advanced further up the Irrawaddy River. By the end of the same year a coup replaced Pagon Min with his half-brother, Mindon Min. The British stopped their incursions and drew a boundary line eighty kilometers above Prome to designate the upper limit of the territory that they had captured. All of Lower Burma was now controlled by the British, effectively cutting off the new king Mindon Min from all access to sea ports for trade, communication, and supplies.

Mindon Min attempted to mend relations with the British. Though he never officially recognized the British claims to Lower Burma, Mindon realized that his country was not in a position to force the British out from their new possessions. Commercial treaties with the British were signed in 1862 and 1867. These treaties eased restrictions on trade along the Irrawaddy; lowered customs duties and limited the royal monopolies to oil, timber, and rubies. Other commodities that used to be managed by the ministry of industry were opened up to British traders. British residents were to be posted in Mandalay, the royal capital, and in Bhamo, which lay close to the Burmese border with China. Mindon was ready to make concessions to the British, in return for which he hoped that the British would eventually return Lower Burma. Mindon was also eager to increase diplomatic contacts with other Western nations.

King Mindon was recognized as a scholar and a peaceful man who practiced the teachings of Buddhism more strictly than many of his predecessors. He sponsored the establishment of many new pagodas and monasteries and donated a gold and jewel-encrusted ornament to be installed at the famous Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon. Perhaps his greatest achievement in religious affairs was the convening of the Fifth Buddhist Council at Mandalay between 1871 and 1874. This international gathering of Buddhists was historic: the last such congress had been held more than 1800 years earlier in Sri Lanka. The Mandalay Council produced an improved text of the Buddhist Tripitaka scriptures, which were carved on 729 stone tablets and displayed in the Kuthodaw Pagoda.

King Mindon also tried to bring about a symbolic new start to his country by moving the royal court to Mandalay. Here he built a palace of teakwood in a walled compound surrounded by a beautiful moat. The walls were 2400 *ta* in circumference (approximately 10 kilometers) to commemorate the year 2400 of the Buddhist calendar. The fabled Mandalay palace came to be known as the "City of Gems," one of the most beautiful palaces in Southeast Asia. Sadly, the palace was later to be destroyed by fire during World War II.

Mindon realized the need to modernize some elements of Burmese social and economic life. He began with a reform of the state bureaucracy. He started paying government officials salaries instead of allowing them to live off of the people in the various provinces and districts they administered. He also introduced important reforms to the Burmese economy. He created the first royal mint, substituting modern coins for the traditional system of payment in kind and barter. He standardized weights and measures to facilitate domestic and international trade and

encouraged royal monopolies of exportable products and commodities to generate national revenue to pay for the operation of the government. He created a ministry of trade that provided a modest foundation for industrialization. This ministry opened several textile mills as well as a number of factories producing such goods as glassware and pottery. To encourage the agricultural sector, rice and wheat mills and sugar refineries were built To improve communication between Upper and Lower Burma, a telegraph system was installed, and a Burmese version of Morse code was devised. Transportation was improved with the purchase of steam-powered river boats and the introduction of regular ferry service along the Irrawaddy, as well as with the building of new roads.

King Mindon tried to offset the isolation of Upper Burma from the outside world by engaging in international diplomacy. He dispatched a mission to the British in Calcutta to renegotiate the status of Lower Burma, but the British were strongly opposed to re-opening the issue. Diplomatic relations were also sought with other European countries, particularly with France and Italy. In 1867 a Burmese delegation visited France and in 1872 a second delegation was sent, this time visiting Britain, France and Italy. Upon hearing that the Burmese had concluded a treaty of commerce and friendship with France, the British feared that the French would supply arms and military training to the Burmese. This suspicion was later fueled by rumors that under the second Franco-Burmese commercial treaty of 1883 the French would take over the management of the Burmese royal monopolies, including the operation of the post and telegraph system. It was also rumored that under the same treaty the French would open a railroad connection between Upper Burma and Vietnam. The proposed railroad was seen as a

threat to British interests in India and as a step by the French to gain the advantage in finding a "back door" to trade with China. In order to prevent the French from succeeding in this project, the British started a move to annex Upper Burma and unite it with Lower Burma, which was already in their control.

More and more, the kingdom's independence was hemmed in by increasing British influence on its government's decisions, such as the right to purchase firearms. King Mindon had agreed to many British demands because he was under pressure from other quarters. There was an attempt to remove him from the throne and his heir apparent was killed together with members of the Council of Ministers. The king himself narrowly escaped assassination.

King Mindon died in 1878. The changes in Burmese society that had occurred during his reign were many and profound. While Mindon attempted to modernize his country with various reforms and innovations, the British presence in the region had become an increasingly greater threat to Burmese independence. The second Anglo-British war had ended with the loss of Lower Burma and the third war would see the final collapse of the Konbaung kingdom.

The last king was Mindon's very young son, Thibaw. The Council of Ministers favored him as successor because they thought they could easily influence him. But others in the royal circle harbored different plans, including the former queen. She had her daughter Supayalat married off to Thibaw, and soon Supayalat was guiding many of the young king's decisions. Court intrigue intensified and there was even rumor that King Thibaw's life was in danger. In contrast to the stable years of King Mindon's reign, King Thibaw's rule was marked by suspicion and mistrust. It was in this period of instability that the third war with the British began.

The immediate trigger igniting the third Anglo-Burmese War was another commercial dispute. The Council of Ministers had imposed a large fine of over £100,000 on the Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation (BBTC) for allegedly evading payment on logs that it had harvested in Burmese territory. The British demanded that the case be solved through arbitration. They further insisted that a British resident be reinstated at the Burmese capital, that the Burmese cooperate in opening an overland route to China, and that the British be allowed to supervise Burma's foreign policy. Accepting these demands would have been a serious compromise of the independent status of Burma, and the British ultimatum went unanswered.

And so the third war began. British troopships steamed up the Irrawaddy on November 17, 1885. The expedition met only scattered resistance, and within eleven days the British had arrived at Mandalay, which they captured with virtually no bloodshed. The Council of Ministers urged the king to flee, but King Thibaw and Queen Supayalat decided to meet the British commander. The following day the royal couple suffered the humiliation of being led away from the palace in a common ox-cart. They were driven down to the river, where they were taken by boat to exile in India. With the fall of King Thibaw the Konbaung dynasty, and with it the independent kingdom of Burma, came to an end.

From Kingdom to Colony

The three Anglo-Burmese wars described above brought about the transformation of Burma from an independent country to a colony of Britain. The first war, ending in 1825,

resulted in the British gaining control of the Tenasserim coast and the Arakan coast, constricting Burmese access to the sea from both east and west. The second war (1852) witnessed the British annexation of the delta region around Rangoon, later to be known as Lower Burma. Finally, during the third war in 1885, the British conquered Upper Burma and pacified the peripheral territories inhabited by the hill tribes. Having combined Lower and Upper Burma, the British administered Burma as a single colony from their headquarters in British India. For practical purposes, therefore, Burma was seen as a province of India. All this occurred in a period of sixty years.

British involvement in Burmese affairs was connected with major British colonial and trade interests in India and China. From their base in India the British wanted to expand their trade with Southeast Asia, particularly the area surrounding the Strait of Malacca, which was the gateway to China by sea. Gaining Burma would bring the British one step closer to achieving an unbroken dominance over the coast line all the way from Bombay to Singapore. The British were also anxious to increase trade with China, whose enormous market was very attractive to international traders. Access to southern China would be possible through an overland route known as the Yunnan corridor. This overland gateway could be approached either through northern Vietnam or northeastern Burma. The British were worried that the French would be the first to gain access to the China trade through the Yunnan corridor, since the French were already gaining ground in Vietnam. British interest in Burma, therefore, was driven by this commercial rivalry with the French.

By the end of the third Anglo-British war in 1885 Britain had deposed the Burmese monarchy and gained at least nominal control over Upper and Lower Burma. On January 1, 1886, Britain formally annexed the kingdom of Burma and incorporated it as a province of the Indian empire. Yet while declaring Burma to be a province of British India was easy enough to put on paper, establishing real control on the ground was a hard and bloody task. Though the third Anglo-Burmese war had lasted only two weeks before the surrender of the Burmese king, it took over 60,000 armed soldiers almost ten more years to completely pacify the country. Remnants of the former Burman army formed pockets of resistance under the leadership of Konbaung princes who plotted to rebuild the kingdom. Ethnic antagonism also increased. British overlords resorted to the strategy of divide and conquer, recruiting Karens to fight Burmans. Ethnic division was made worse by religious conflict, because missionaries were converting many Karens into Christians. The Burmans were thus resisting both a foreign enemy and a foreign religion.

The British brought many changes to the administration system of Burma. While chiefs in some of the remoter hill areas were allowed to retain traditional powers, the core areas of Upper and Lower Burma were put under control of a colonial bureaucracy that undermined the position of the traditional district chiefs and village headmen. In effect much of the local autonomy formerly enjoyed by the village headmen was lost under foreign rule.

Moreover, the ***sangha***, or brotherhood of Buddhist monks, lost the patronage of the government when the monarchy was abolished. The colonial government maintained a policy of religious neutrality, depriving the sangha of state assistance, which had been a major traditional

source of legitimacy and support. Thus the major institutions of Burmese society -- monarchy, sangha, and local government administration -- were all damaged and distorted under British impact. This state of colonial dependence would only come to an end with the re-emergence of an independent Burma in 1947.

From Colony to Nation

The transformation of Burma from colony to nation is largely the story of three young nationalist leaders: Aung San, U Nu, and Ne Win. Together with a small network of other young nationalists, these three planned, fought, and negotiated for the creation of an independent Burma.. Tragically, Aung San was assassinated just as independence was achieved, but both U Nu and Ne Win survived to become prime ministers of post-colonial Burma.

Aung San and Maung Nu (as U Nu was then known -- see chapter three for more information regarding Burmese naming conventions) started as student political leaders at Rangoon University. In 1935 Maung Nu was elected president of the Rangoon University Student Union while Aung San was elected secretary. They masterminded the popular use of the polite address "thakin." Similar in meaning to the Indian word "sahib," the word "thakin" may be translated as "master," a colonial term of respect and submission which natives only used to address their British overlords. Aung San and Maung Nu felt that the use of the title "thakin" fostered a slave mentality among Burmese. They wanted their people to break out of this

servility and colonial inferiority and to symbolically view themselves as masters by addressing each other as "thakin." Because of its use of this term, the political movement which Aung San and Maung Nu led came to be known as the Thakin Movement.

Growth of Nationalism

The political climate in Burma in the 1930's was marked by widespread disorder and agitation for political change. It was a time of worldwide economic depression, and large waves of immigration into Burma, particularly from India, led to increased economic hardship and competition for jobs. There was unrest among peasants in the country side, dissatisfaction among factory workers, political activism among Buddhist monks, and intellectual ferment among urban professionals. Reactions to these threats were articulated by students leaders like Aung San and Maung Nu.

The climate of unrest was intensified by racial tension. The opening up of the delta region for commercial rice cultivation had attracted many farmers and entrepreneurs from Upper Burma. Obtaining and clearing the new land required money, which was often lent to the poor farmers by Indian money-lenders known as Chettiars. The many Chettiars in and around Rangoon at this time were mainly from Madras, India. They loaned money to the Burman farmers at high interest rates. When the economy was healthy, the borrowers produced good harvests and made enough money to pay back their loans. When the economy went bad, farmers could not pay back and

had to surrender their farms to the money lenders. The Chettiars became absentee landlords, often renting out the lands that they had acquired through foreclosure. This created deep resentment among Burmans.

The growing social inequality in agriculture was only part of a larger pyramid of inequality, a feature that characterized most colonial societies in other parts of Asia. At the top of the pyramid were the British and other Westerners who occupied the key positions in government, business, industry, and the professions. In the middle echelon were found other foreigners, mostly Indian and Chinese traders, small business owners, and technicians in engineering and medical professions. Indians comprised only 10% of the total population of the Burmese delta region, but occupied more than 50% of government jobs. At the bottom of the pyramid were the Burmese, who often competed with the poorer Indians for farm or factory jobs.

The appearance of so many foreigners in Burma encouraged the Burmans to search for a way develop a stronger sense of Burmese unity and identity. One cultural element shared by nearly all Burmans was the Buddhist religion. Thus Buddhism began to function as a unifying element in national social and political movements.

Many nonpolitical organizations sprouted in Burmese society, nearly all of them sharing a connection with Buddhism. One of the most important of these was the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association), patterned after the YMCA. The YMBA sponsored seminars and discussions that included religion, culture, and politics. All the various associations came together under the umbrella of a national organization called the GCBA--General Council of Buddhist Associations. Initially the GCBA and its member organizations were concerned

principally with Buddhism and how it protected and enhanced Burmese culture and society. Eventually the GCBA took on a more political and nationalist orientation, which was symbolized by replacing the word "Buddhist" in the organization's name with the word "Burmese".

The shift from religious to political organization is easily understood when it is remembered that religious concerns and social issues were closely linked. This is well illustrated in the so-called "shoe question." During King Mindon's reign, the unwillingness of the British resident to remove his shoes when entering the King's presence had resulted in a break in diplomatic relations. When Burma became a colony, many foreigners began to visit Buddhist pagodas and temples, where by custom shoes were not allowed. But more and more foreigners refused to conform to this tradition. This bothered the Burmese, especially the monks. The YMBA petitioned the government to legally ban the use of footwear in pagodas by any visitor, whether Burmese or foreign. But the government refused to pass a law to this effect. One monk published a book called On the Impropriety of Wearing Shoes on Pagoda Platforms. The book aroused so much public indignation that a group of foreigners who entered a temple in Mandalay without removing their shoes was attacked by monks. Four of the monks were punished and one was sentenced to life imprisonment. What started as a minor question of religious custom quickly became a major political issue. Buddhist religion and Burmese nationalism increasingly became fused in this period.

Sometimes the nationalist spirit led to outright rebellion. Saya San, a former monk, announced that he was a king, and set up a "palace" in the Tharrawaddy District north of Rangoon. He utilized Buddhist ideas but mixed them with magical and animist practices. Saya

San achieved the support of many rural folk, who joined him in his protest against British rule. The revolt was only fully suppressed by the British after two years and the intervention of 8,000 soldiers.

While the Saya San rebellion failed in its goal to re-establish the monarchy, it inspired a more coordinated political movement among students and professionals. One organization to come out of the urban centers was called ***Dobama Asiayone*** (We Burmans Association). The "thakin" leaders Aung San and Maung Nu were members of this organization. These two student activists had been dismissed from the university for an article they had published in the school newspaper. The expulsion of these popular student leaders led to a massive student strike, which closed down the campus. The striking students chose the Shwedagon Pagoda as their headquarters -- again indicating the close link between religion and politics.

In response to these expressions of unrest, the British instituted a dual-government system known as dyarchy or shared authority. This essentially meant having legislative councils in which Burmese officials, either elected or appointed, would be given a measure of authority. The ultimate authority, however, would still be retained by the British governor or commissioner. Some politicians in Burma supported the idea, but others opposed it because what they really wanted was complete independence, with no sharing of power with a foreign authority. In 1935 the British Parliament voted to separate Burma administratively from India. This new arrangement was again motivated to appease nationalistic demands, while still retaining ultimate power in the hands of a British governor.

The Japanese Interlude

While Burmese nationalists and student activists were agitating for independence from the British, the Japanese were taking the first steps leading to the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific region. The entry of the Japanese army into Burma in 1942 had a significant impact on the Burmese drive towards independence. Just before the Japanese entered Burma, Aung San formed the Freedom Bloc, which agreed to fight for complete Burmese independence from Britain.

The Japanese themselves were eager to make contact with Burmese leaders, especially with the Freedom Bloc leader Aung San. In August 1940 Aung San and a fellow "thakin" were smuggled out of Burma to Japan where he and a Japanese colonel, Suzuki Keiji, laid the groundwork for armed struggle against the British. On his return from Japan, Aung San recruited 28 Burmese compatriots to undergo military training in Japan. These 28 men, together with Aung San and his companion, were later referred to as the Thirty Comrades. They formed the core of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA). One leader who helped in the capture of Rangoon from the British was Thakin Shu Maung, who later came to be known as General Ne Win, a name which means "brilliant as the sun."

Soon most of Burma was in Japanese hands. Aung San was made a general and U Nu was given an important post in the new government, but the Japanese retained control of the country and it soon became apparent that conditions were not getting any better for the average

Burmese. When the tide of war turned against the Japanese, General Aung San and his companions began secret contacts with the British, and helped the Allies recapture Rangoon.

Under Aung San's leadership, a new political organization was formed -- the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League or AFPFL. It was made up of key elements from the Burmese National Army, the communists, the socialists, and members of the "thakin" movement. Aung San was able to forge links with the Karen National Organization and the remnants of the pre-war Dobama Asiayone. Aung San's party held considerable influence, though some people disliked his cooperation with the Japanese at the beginning of the war.

The Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945. The British had returned to Burma, and there was discussion about Burma's eventual independence. The British devised a plan under which they would retain temporary authority over all of Burma through the appointment of a British governor. The plan also divided the country into "Burma Proper" (to be given full self-government in 1948) and the "border areas" (those areas inhabited by non-Burman minorities like the Shans and Karens), which would remain under direct British rule indefinitely. The intent was to limit Burmese national territory and the scope of Burmese independence.

Aung San opposed this British proposal. He wanted full independence for the whole of Burma, including the hill countries, and he used the AFPFL as a vehicle to oppose the partition plan. Opposition to the British government reached the brink of total rebellion. The British governor finally decided to collaborate with the AFPFL. In December 1946 the British Prime Minister Clement Atlee invited Aung San to London to discuss independence. The following January they signed an agreement arranging for the election of a constituent assembly -- a group

of Burmese leaders who would prepare a new constitution for an independent Burma. The most important achievement of Aung San's mission to London, however, was the British agreement that both Burma Proper and the border areas would be included in the future boundaries of the new nation. In April, 1947, Aung San and his Anti-Facist People's Freedom League won a resounding victory in the elections that were held to determine who would lead Burma after independence was granted.

Aung San never tasted the fruits of his victory. On July 19, 1947, Aung San and many of his cabinet ministers were meeting in the Secretariat building in Rangoon. Suddenly two jeeps filled with armed men dressed in battle fatigues entered the compound: the intruders rushed into the meeting room and opened fire, killing Aung San and six cabinet members.

A few months later, on October 17, 1947 the independent Union of Burma was proclaimed. Officiating at this historic occasion were Prime Minister U Nu representing Burma, and Prime Minister Clement Attlee representing Britain. Conspicuously absent was Thakin Aung San, who at age 32 had given his life for Burmese independence.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

I Fill in the blanks.

1. _____, an early center of Burmese culture, was attacked by the forces of Kublai Khan in the late 13th century.

2. _____, a country bordering Burma that was formerly known as Siam, has been invaded by the armies of several Burmese kings.

3. King Alaungpaya captured this city, site of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, and named it _____, which means "end of strife."

4. The 1826 Treaty of Yandabo, in which Burma gave up control of the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts, concluded the _____ Anglo-Burmese War.

5. Independent Burma was proclaimed on October 17, _____.

6. Representing Burma at the proclamation of Burmese independence was _____.

7. Conspicuously absent from the Burmese independence proclamation was _____, the architect of Burmese independence who was killed four months prior to the occasion.

8. The three nationalist leaders who led the drive to modernize Burma were Aung San, U Nu, and _____.

9. The Burmese term "thakin" which is similar to the Indian "sahib" may be translated as _____.

10. The Indian money-lenders in Burma were called _____.

II Multiple Choice: Circle the letter of the correct answer for each question.

1. A famous early king of the Toungoo dynasty was

(a) Anawrahta (b) Tabinshwehti

(c) Mindon Min (d) Alaungpaya

2. The Pagan kingdom was a center of power for the

(a) Shan (b) Karen

(c) Burmans (d) Pyu

3. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War, this Burmese king became an active proponent of Buddhism and initiated many reform measures to modernize Burma.

(a) Mindon Min
(b) Pagon Min
(c) Thibaw
(d) Bodawpaya

4. The opening up of new agricultural land in the delta region of Lower Burma attracted many farmers from Upper Burma who

(a) opened large teak and rubber estates
(b) often borrowed money to help begin rice cultivation
(c) farmed as tenants of the king
(d) farmed as tenants of the Chinese

5. The growing social inequality in agriculture was only part of a larger pyramid of inequality. Which of the following statements does not truly reflect the situation in Burma.

(a) the British and other Westerners were on top
(b) the Indian and Chinese traders were in the middle
(c) poor Burmese farmers and workers were at the bottom
(d) many Burmese technocrats shared power with the British

6. The Indian immigrant population in Lower Burma had grown from 297,000 in 1901 to over half a million by the 1930's (10% of the total population of the delta region). They occupied about

(a) 20% of government jobs
(b) 30% of government jobs
(c) 40% of government jobs
(d) 50% of government jobs

7. The "shoe question" during the period of social activism referred to

(a) going barefooted in the presence of the king

(b) going barefooted in entering pagodas

(c) removing muddy shoes during the monsoons

(d) learning how to wear shoes like westerners

8. The Saya San rebellion

(a) was inspired by Aung San

(b) was started by a former monk

(c) was a plot started by the Burmese army

(d) was supported by the sangha

9. Aung San and U Nu were dismissed from the university

(a) for helping the Saya San rebellion

(b) for publishing an article in the student newspaper

(c) for leading a student strike

(d) for studying marxist literature

10. The student strikers defended themselves by occupying the

(a) the Shwezigon Pagoda

(b) the Shwedagon Pagoda

(c) the Ananda Pagoda

(d) the Rangoon Pagoda

III Creative Writing

1. Imagine you are a member of the Council of Ministers during the reign of Mindon Min. Write an entry in your journal describing the changes that have occurred during Mindon's rule. Use your imagination to picture how these changes are affecting the daily life of the general population.

2. Assume you are a young "thakin" activist working with Aung San and U Nu. Write a one page article for the student newspaper describing why the Burmese should call each other "thakin."

IV Class Discussion

Why did Britain get involved in the three Anglo-Burmese wars? Do you think Britain was justified in going to war and /or in taking over parts of Burma? Why or why not?

V For Further Study

Find at least two sources of information about King Mindon and King Mongkut (reigned 1851-1868) of Siam (Thailand). Compare and contrast the achievements of these two kings.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION

Buddhism is so fundamental to the history of Burma that it has come to reflect the soul of Burmese society. The majority of Burmese practice Buddhism and it is through Buddhism that many Burmese define themselves -- their history, their social philosophy, their institutions, and their hopes for the future.

Buddhism, like Hinduism, originated in India. The founder of the religion, Siddartha Gautama, lived close to the foothills of the Himalayan mountains (in the region near the borders between modern Nepal and India) during the fifth century BC. Gautama was the son of a king, but he renounced his royal status in order to seek spiritual enlightenment. Gautama attained this enlightenment after much meditation. In contrast to some religious figures of the time who sought spiritual goals through extreme asceticism and self-denial, Gautama advocated a "Middle Way" or moderate lifestyle. After his enlightenment, Gautama became known as Buddha, and devoted the rest of his life to teaching his wisdom to others.

At one time much of India had converted to Buddhism. The great Indian emperor Asoka was responsible for encouraging the spread of Buddhism, and even sent Buddhist monks overseas, including delegations to Burma. Eventually, however, Hinduism regained its dominant position as the main religion within India. But by that time Buddhism had already been adopted by many societies outside of the Indian subcontinent, especially the countries in Southeast Asia.

As Buddhism evolved and spread to other lands, it split into two major branches: Mahayana, "the great vehicle," and Hinayana," the small vehicle."

Mahayana Buddhism spread into China, Korea, and Japan. Hinayana, also known as Theravada Buddhism, flourished in Sri Lanka and from there it spread to Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. It was Theravada Buddhism that King Anawrahta brought to Pagan with the conquered Mon court from Thaton. And it was from the Mon monks of Thaton that the Burmans of Pagan received the Buddhist scriptures and the Pali alphabet, which they adapted to their own language.

In Burma, Theravada Buddhism has influenced both the social outlook of individuals and the political interaction of groups in society. The teachings of Buddhism touch all aspects of life: how to deal with spiritual and moral concerns; how to relate to the material world; and how rulers should exercise power over people and how people should relate to authority.

Concepts and Teachings of Buddhism

One important Buddhist teaching is related to the concept of the mandala, or mystic circle. The universe itself is a giant mandala having both a center and a periphery. The center of the universe is represented by the cosmic Mount Meru. The mandala establishes the four cardinal directions of north, south, east and west.

The center-periphery concept has had many applications in Burma. Mandala is reflected in the lay-out of villages, in the plan of cities, in the architectural design of temples and palaces,

and in the organization of kingdoms. A kingdom is considered a microcosm or a scale model of the universe: the king at the center is surrounded by concentric circles of peoples and territories subject to him. The king's power flows from the inside out to the far reaches of the kingdom: it is strongest at the center while gradually fading away out toward the periphery.

Another key Buddhist teaching is summed up in the concept of dharma, which may be translated as "the law of the universe." The law of dharma decrees that all living beings --from animals to humans, spirits, and gods -- are arranged from lower to higher ranks according to the merit that they have attained. Thus one's status in life is determined by the amount of merit built up in a previous life. The main way to gain and accumulate merit is by performing good deeds. More accumulated merit means a higher status; loss of merit means a demotion in status. Merit gained through good work determines social position, wealth, power, authority, and legitimacy. The desire to gain merit was thus the single strongest motivation for all Burmese, from the poorest farmer to the most powerful king.

Buddhists in Burma today still follow the merit-path to salvation, for it is through the accumulation of merit that one reaches a better station in life in the next cycle of reincarnation. In the Burmese world view, nothing is permanent. Everything is always in a state of change. According to the doctrine of dharma, living beings go through repeated "rebirths," each time being reborn with a higher or lower status, depending on one's accumulated merit. Building up merit takes time and effort and may require many rebirths until one achieves the perfection of Buddhahood. Ultimately, one hopes to escape the cycle of life altogether and enter Nirvana. Only with the release of Nirvana does the cycle of rebirths end.

Buddhism in Daily Life

The idea of gaining merit by doing good is basic to Burmese social life and individual behavior. Every morning Buddhist monks leave their monasteries with their bowls to walk through the villages and towns and collect food for their daily meal. This allows people to gain merit by donating food to them. Providing water to travelers is another way to make merit. Along the roadside in small towns and villages one often finds ceramic pots that are filled with water so that passing travelers may quench their thirst.

Other merit-making activities include making donations to pagodas and monasteries and especially paying for the cost of building pagodas and monasteries. Pagan grew into an architectural marvel because the kings of Pagan sought to make merit and demonstrate their high status as rulers by building large monuments that cost great sums of money.

In Burma today, the tradition of donating money for the upkeep and building of pagodas and monasteries is still very strong. When you enter a pagoda, there is always a long line of donation boxes, each for a different part of the pagoda's upkeep. For example, you could buy a marble square for a new walkway around the pagoda platform. Marble is cool and will not burn bare feet on a sunny day, so many pagodas have a special walkway made of marble for worshippers to walk on. You can put your money in the box to pay for robes for the monks to wear or to pay for books and writing materials for the monastery school. When you put your money in the box for electricity or lights, you receive double merit!

Even when people don't have money, they can still make donations to the pagoda. Early in the mornings, many go to the pagoda to sweep the platform or clean the yard. Some refill the big jars of drinking water so that visitors can always get a drink of water when they are thirsty. There are many ways to make merit by doing good deeds.

Every important occasion for Buddhists in Burma is marked by a gathering in which monks are offered food. After a wedding, to celebrate and confirm the marriage, on the anniversary of a relative's death, to honor a new graduate or to celebrate the purchase or building of a new house -- all such occasions call for a gathering in which monks are invited to chant and give prayers, and the hosts provide abundant food for them and the guests.

The Sangha

The Buddhist monkhood is known as the sangha. All male Buddhists are expected to join the monkhood at some time in their lives. A colorful and lively ceremony known as the ***shinbyu*** is held to mark a boy's entrance to the sangha. The boy is first dressed up as a prince and then rides on a pony or is carried around the village. This symbolizes the life of Gautama as a young prince before he received enlightenment. Later the boy's head is shaved and he formally asks for admittance to the sangha. Discarding his princely costume for Buddhist robes, the boy is then taken to the ***kyaung*** (monastery), where he will follow the life of a monk. Meanwhile, at the boy's home, a feast is prepared for family, neighbors, and friends.

Most novices will only stay at the monastery for a few weeks or months, but some may decide to stay on and become fully ordained monks. Regardless of their length of stay, all members of the monastery lead simple lives, and are only allowed a few possessions. Each monk may keep a set of saffron-colored robes, a sleeping mat, a begging bowl with which to receive food from the community, and an umbrella. Each morning the monks awake before dawn to begin their prayers and meditation. Later in the morning they walk through the community to receive food for their meal. No food may be consumed after midday and the rest of the day is spent in prayers, meditation and religious study.

Monks are honored members of society. They represent the society's commitment to perpetuate the Buddhist way of life. The sangha also forms a coherent network that links otherwise isolated villages and provides a common sense of identity to the community at large. Monks are also respected for their knowledge and education. In earlier times a young boy was likely to receive most of his education at a monastery: the custom of sending all boys to the monastery, where they could learn to read and write, resulted in a high literacy rate throughout Burma.

While the sangha represents the spiritual force of society, the ordinary people help support the material needs of the monks. Supporting the religious community of the sangha through donations of food or money represents an opportunity for the ordinary person to gain merit. During the days of the monarchy, the kings and queens of Burma were also expected to support the sangha. By bestowing rich gifts to the monasteries, the king could gain merit and demonstrate his support. In turn, the sangha, as a powerful and respected force in society, could

help legitimize the rule of the king. Thus the sangha has been characterized throughout its long history by reciprocal relations both with the monarchy and with the common people.

Despite the many political and economic problems that have buffeted Burma throughout its long history, the country continues to enjoy the sustaining and unifying spirit of Buddhism. Although there is official separation of church and state, in 1980 the government sponsored the First Congregation of the Sangha of All Orders for Purification, Perpetuation, and Propagation of the Sasana. It was held at Rangoon at the same site where U Nu had convened the Sixth World Buddhist Council of 1954-1956. The Congregation was attended by 1,218 representatives of various orders of the sangha. It approved the establishment of new institutional structures to promote and protect the ideals and practice of the Buddhist monkhood. Ne Win himself, like the early kings, ordered the construction of a new pagoda near the Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon. In July 1980 U Nu, enjoying government amnesty, returned to Burma to spend his last years in religious scholarship. The bond between the people and the sangha remains.

The Shwedagon Pagoda

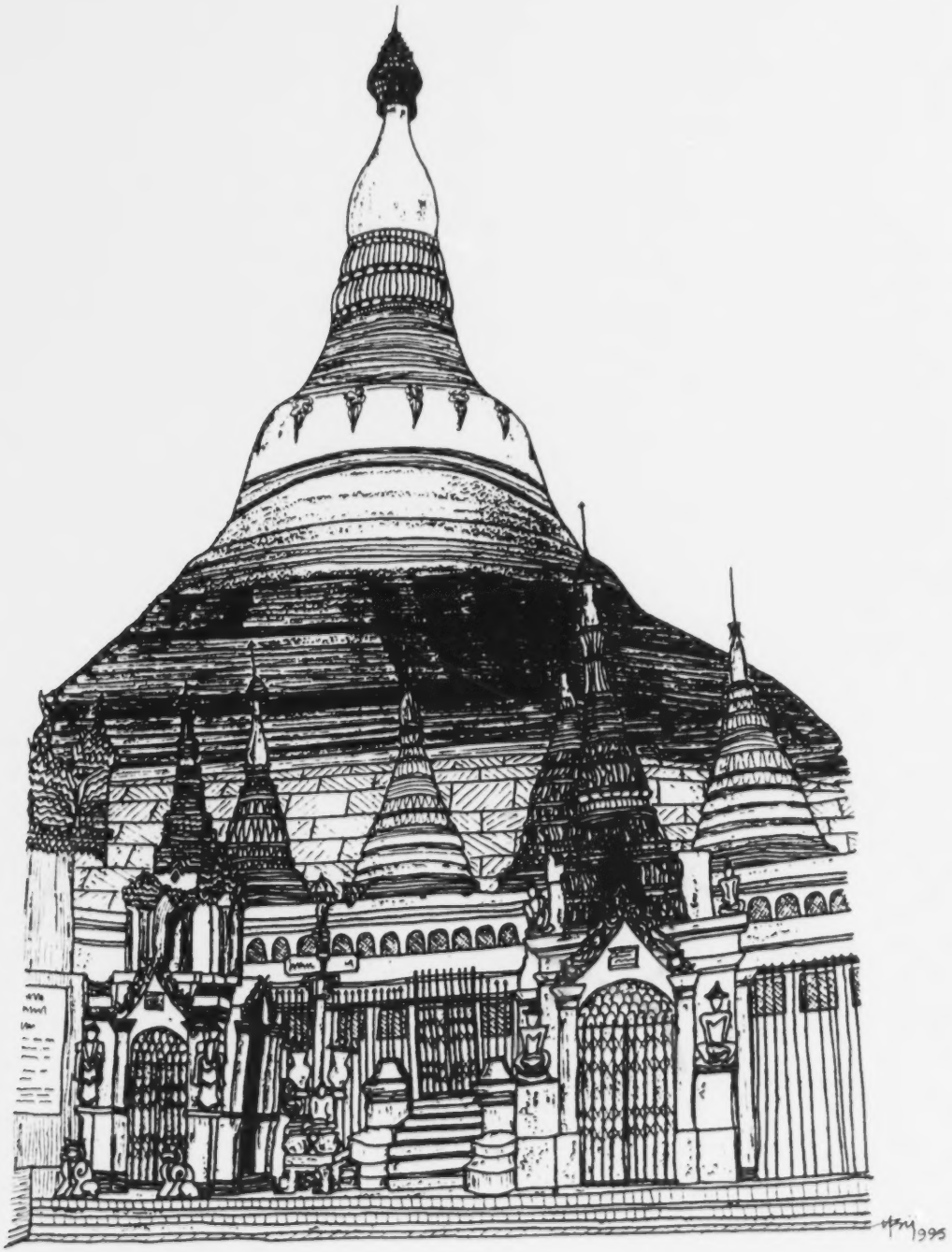
Though there are many thousands of pagodas in Burma, undoubtedly the most famous of these is the Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon. Legend states that the shrine dates back to the time of the Buddha. It is said that the Buddha himself gave eight of his hairs to two Mon traders, who brought the relics back from India to Burma and established the shrine. The Shwedagon is even said to contain relics from three previous Buddhas. While it is difficult to scientifically date the age of the pagoda, it is known to have been there for many centuries. Royal inscriptions referring

to it date back to the early Burmese kingdoms, and as early as the 1580s it was even known by European travelers, one of whom marveled at its beauty and proclaimed it "the fairest place, as I suppose, that is in the world."

Today the pagoda maintains its brilliance and its special place as a symbol of Burmese Buddhism. The pagoda rests on the top of a hill, and to reach it one must first ascend one of the covered stairways that have been built at each of the four compass points. The southern entrance is the most widely used, and its base is flanked by a huge pair of statues representing mythical lion-like creatures. One must remove one's shoes before using the stairway. Along the way to the top one may purchase various items, such as gold leaf to be used for offerings. At the top of the covered staircase the visitor walks once again into the bright sunlight of the main terrace, filled with special shrines and pavilions that surround the great stupa itself.

The main stupa is over one hundred meters high and is topped with a ***hti***, or special umbrella that serves as a spire. The hti of the Shwedagon has been replaced and rededicated several times. King Mindon, for example, sent a heavily bejeweled hti to the pagoda in 1871, even though the British prevented him from attending the ceremony. Today the hti is said to contain more than 10,000 diamonds, sapphires, and rubies (the diamond at the very top weighs 76 carats).

Over the years the pagoda itself has been enlarged and the main stupa (dome) has been recased seven times. The contributions of countless visitors have enabled the top 33 feet of the spire to be covered in gold plating one sixteenth of an inch thick. New shrines are constantly being added.



Part of The Shwedagon Pagoda

By custom the visitor should walk in a clockwise direction around the pagoda. At equal intervals around the square base of the pagoda are eight posts representing each of the eight planets. The Burmese associate each planet with a particular day of the week (Wednesday is divided into two short days representing the morning and the afternoon, thus providing eight days in the week). The day upon which one is born is very important in Burmese astrology, and many people visit the appropriate planetary post at the Shwedagon depending on which day of the week they were born. Each planet is also associated with a particular animal. For example, if you were born on a Monday, you would visit the planetary post for the Moon, and you would see the sign of the tiger: if you were Thursday-born, you would visit the post for Jupiter at the sign of the rat. Many other pavilions abound around the main terrace, including one for Bo Bo Gyi, the guardian ***nat*** (spirit) of Shwedagon, and Thagyamin, king of the nats.

The World of Nats and Spirits

Long before the Buddhism was introduced to Burma, the people practiced a religion that anthropologists call animism, which involves a belief in supernaturalism and spirits. In Burmese supernaturalism, the spirits are called nats. When King Anawrahta of Pagan made Theravada Buddhism the state religion, he wisely understood that he could not simply eliminate the belief in spirits by decree so he allowed the traditional belief in nats to coexist with Buddhism.

Although they are not a part of Buddhism, nats are an important part of everyday life all over Burma. Some nats are thought to dwell in heavenly abodes, and have taken on the

characteristics of some of the Indian gods and goddesses known in Hinduism. Another class of nat is believed to live on earth: these nats include the spirits of natural objects and forces, such as trees, stones, wind, and water. Still another kind of nat are those that are said to be the souls of ancestors or the spirits of those who died violent or "green" deaths. In these different types of nat one may see the representation of foreign gods, animism, and ancestor worship. All these religious influences have been incorporated and maintained in nat worship.

There is, therefore, a wide variety of nats that are recognized in Burma. There are house nats, village nats, mountain nats, river nats, and field nats. Other nats are guardian spirits to whom villagers must offer sacrifices to gain their good will or to soften their anger at some failures or wrong deeds committed by individuals. Nats are venerated in order to receive good luck and avert misfortune.

The ***einhsaung*** nat is the house nat. By tradition a coconut was always tied to the south side of the house as an offering to this nat. Strips of yellow and red ribbon were sometimes attached to the coconut, which had to be replaced before it had completely dried up. The name of the einhsaung nat is Min Mahagiri. He is thought to have possessed enormous strength when he lived in human form. He worked as a blacksmith, and held a huge iron hammer in each hand: when the hammers hit the anvil the earth itself shook at the impact. The neighboring king was jealous of Mahagiri's strength and feared him as a potential rival. The king devised a plan to get rid of Mahagiri: he married Mahagiri's sister, Shwe Myet Nha (Golden Face), and invited Mahagiri to his house. When Mahagiri arrived, he was seized and tied to a tree. He was then burnt to death, and his loyal sister jumped into the flames to die with him. The spirits of these

two live on as nats, and are regarded as the king and queen of the spirit world. They preside over the nat world from their home on Mount Popa, an extinct volcano near the fabled ancient city of Pagan.

The Burmese royal families honored the famous "Thirty Seven Nats" most of whom represent the ancestors of former kings and queens who died while on the throne. In the Burmese palace the Thirty Seven Nats were represented by figurines made of gold. Respect and homage to the Thirty Seven Nats were made three times a year, and such ceremonies encouraged the various dynasties to find a common link to foster national integration. Even Shans and Mons, who are non-Burmans, were represented by ancestors among the Thirty Seven Nats. Thus these guardian spirits function somewhat like the patron saints of Burma.

Belief in nats is still widespread. One of Burma's most famous leaders, the former prime minister U Nu, noted in his autobiography that he regularly performed the ***bali natsar*** ceremony, in which food is offered to the nats to obtain protection from danger and to ensure the well-being of all the people in the world. When traveling abroad on state visits, U Nu used to carry a wooden case containing another smaller wooden case, as well as plates, cups, and candles for making offerings. Both boxes folded out into tables. The larger table was used to make daily offerings to the "Three Noble Gems" (the Buddha, the Dhamma [the law, or Buddha's teachings], and the Sangha), while the smaller table was used to make offerings to the nats.

While the worship of nats is not part of orthodox Buddhism, it has maintained its place in the spiritual life of the Burmese for centuries. Some people consider the realm of the nats to be more closely associated with the day-to-day concerns of the average person. People are naturally

interested in achieving success in the immediate concerns of life: the farmer hopes for a good harvest, the traveler wishes to arrive safely at the desired destination, and the student needs to pass the final exam at the end of the semester. The concerns of Buddhism, however, may be seen as more spiritual in nature. Thus Buddhism and nat-worship have co-existed by answering different needs. The process by which they have accommodated each other is a good example of religious syncretism. Other similar examples exist in many other religious traditions around the world.

Christianity, Islam and Hinduism

Although the majority of Burmese are Buddhist, other world religions are practiced in Burma. Burmese society is tolerant of other religions, and there is no stigma attached to being a non-Buddhist in Burma.

Among Christians, there are both Catholics and Protestants. The British introduced Anglicism and other Protestant denominations, and Catholicism was brought by French and Portuguese missionaries. Many of the Christians in Burma are to be found among the tribal peoples of the highlands, and many of them are Baptists. The American Baptist Mission entered Burma in the nineteenth century and played an important role in education. The American missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Judson were pioneers in linguistic studies in Burma and wrote the first English-Burmese grammars and dictionaries.

Most followers of Islam and Hinduism in Burma today are descendants of immigrants from India and Bangladesh who were brought to Burma by the British during the colonial period to work as laborers, money-lenders, or lower level civil servants.

Student Activities.

I Multiple Choice.

1) Buddhism originated in

(a) India
(b) Sri Lanka
(c) Burma
(d) Thailand

2) The variety of Buddhism practiced in Burma is called

(a) Mahayana
(b) Theravada
(c) Zen
(d) Nat

3) Which of the following acts would **not** bring merit:

(a) providing water to travelers
(b) giving food to monks
(c) killing mosquitoes that disturb the concentration of meditating monks
(d) making contributions to help pay for the maintenance of a pagoda

4) Among Burmese Buddhists, the percentage of males who enter the monastery at some time in their lives is:

(a) about 25%
(b) about 50%
(c) about 75%
(d) almost 100%

5) The Buddhist monkhood is known as the

(a) kyaung
(b) sangha
(c) shinbyu
(d) hti

6) Which of the following is **not** true about the Shwedagon Pagoda:

(a) one must remove one's shoes before entering the pagoda

(b) the pagoda was built in 1871 by King Mindon

(c) the top of the stupa (dome) is covered with real gold plating

(d) there are pavilions for nats within the pagoda grounds

7) Nats are best described as

(a) Buddhist gods

(b) ancient Indian kings and queens

(c) spirits

(d) monks

8) Burmese belief in Nats is best characterized as

(a) a relatively recent phenomenon

(b) limited in practice to the royal court

(c) an animist tradition that has evolved to co-exist successfully with Buddhism

(d) incompatible with belief in Buddhism according to most Burmese

9) The king who brought Theravada Buddhism to the court at Pagan was

(a) Anawrahta

(b) Asoka

(c) Gautama

(d) Tabinshwehti

10) All of the following religions can easily be found in Burma **except**

(a) Christianity

(b) Islam

(c) Shintoism

(d) Hinduism

II Fill in the Blanks.

1) Siddartha Gautama later became known as _____.

2) Many Buddhists seek to gain _____ so that they will be reborn in a higher position in their next life.

3) The ceremony marking a boy's entrance to the monkhood is known as the _____.

4) The Shwedagon Pagoda is said to have hair relics that belonged to _____.

5) In earlier times most Burmese boys learned to read and write while in the _____.

6) A _____ was often tied to a Burmese house as an offering to Min Mahagiri, the house nat.

7) Many Burmese kings and queens are represented in a special group of nats known as the _____.

8) Most followers of Islam and Hinduism in Burma today are those whose families came from _____ or _____.

9) Buddhist monks leave the monastery every day carrying a _____ with which they receive gifts of food.

10) The Buddha taught people to avoid extremes of indulgence and of self-denial: because of this he is said to have advocated a _____ as the path to enlightenment.

III Creative Writing.

Imagine that you have just returned home after one month in a Buddhist monastery. Describe to your friends and family how it feels to follow the lifestyle of a monk. Include details of your daily routine and how you felt at your shinbyu ceremony.

IV Class Discussion.

Do you think the Burmese belief in Buddhism and nats is incompatible? Should religion concern itself only with the spiritual side of human nature or should it involve worldly concerns as well? How do other major world religions deal with people's desires for both spiritual contentment and worldly success?

CHAPTER FOUR

LIFE AND CULTURE

In this chapter, readers will be presented with brief descriptions of some of the beliefs, customs, and practices found among the Burmese. It should be remembered that there is a wide variation in customs and beliefs throughout the country due to the existence many different ethnic groups. Furthermore, no culture remains static, and some of the traditional beliefs are currently being transformed or abandoned, especially in the urban centers that are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and subject to foreign influences.

Burmese Names and Terms of Address:

The Burmese use a system of honorofics when referring to each other. These terms of address function somewhat similarly to the English use of terms such as "Mister," "Miss," or "Mrs." A common term seen in this book is "U" as in U Thant or U Nu. "U" will often be translated as "Mister" but it can also be thought of as meaning "uncle" in the same way that many Asian cultures use such a term to suggest seniority and respect. (In other words it does not necessarily imply any blood relationship as in the literal Western meaning of the word "uncle".) Another honorific which can stand easily for "Mister" is "Maung" as in "Maung San Nyun." The literal meaning of "Maung" is "brother." "Ko" means "elder brother" and is often used among

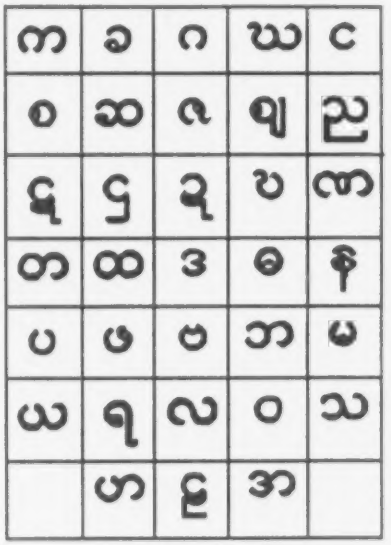
adult males of similar ages. A young man may therefore be referred to as "Maung Sein," but with increased age will gradually start to be called "Ko Sein" and later "U Sein."

The most common female honorific is "Ma" which literally means "sister" and may be used for any woman. A more respectful term for a woman is "Daw," (literally "aunt"). When a lady is somewhat elderly, she may be referred to as "Me." A young husband might address his young wife affectionately as "Mi Mi." Note, however, that one cannot determine a woman's marital status from whether she is called "Ma", "Daw", or "Me" -- any of these terms could translate to the English "Ms.", "Miss", or "Mrs."

The Burmese have an intricate system for choosing names. They first divide the letters of the Burmese alphabet into groups and assign them to the days of the week. If the child is born on a Monday, he or she would receive names whose initial letters are derived from the "Monday letters." And so on for children born on Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. The letters associated for each day are as follows:

DAY OF THE WEEK	FIRST LETTER WITH WHICH NAME MAY BEGIN
Monday	ka, kha, ga, gha, nga
Tuesday	sa, hsa, za, zha, nya
Wednesday (until noon)	la, wa
Wednesday (noon until midnight)	ya, ra
Thursday	pa, hpa, ba, bha, ma
Friday	tha, ha
Saturday	ta, hta, da, dha, na
Sunday	a (or any other vowel)

For example, a man born on a Monday might be named Maung Ngwe Khaing or Maung Gauk, while a woman born on that day might be called Ma Khin or Ma Kwe Yo. Likewise, suitable names for those born on Tuesday would include Maung San Yun, Maung Po Sin or Ma So. It should be obvious why former prime minister U Nu's autobiography is entitled "U Nu: Saturday's Son."



The Burmese Alphabet

The Burmese may change their names as they go through life, either simply because they prefer a new name or because of a major event, such as entering a monastery. A significant event in the life of every Burmese man is his entry into a monastery where he may learn the basics of Buddhism. The change from a secular to a religious life is marked by the adoption of a religious

name called a ***bwe***. Most often the names taken up by young student-monks are derived not from Burmese but from Pali, an ancient Indian language used to record many of the original Buddhist scriptures. When a person leaves the monastery to assume life in the secular world again, he would abandon his ***bwe*** and take up his former name or assume another name. He would never be referred to again by his monastery name.

It is interesting to note that the Burmese traditionally do not have family names that are passed on to each new generation. Neither do married women adopt the name of their husband. Thus there is no way to tell from the names of two people whether or not they are related (by blood or by marriage). A person's name remains an individual matter.

When referring to a Burmese person's name it is customary to use all the words in the name. Thus one would refer to Maung Htin Aung by using the full name (and the honorific), not just "Htin" or "Aung."

Supernaturalism and Astrology:

Burmese belief in supernaturalism and astrology is widespread. The ascendant planet, star, or constellation at the time of one's birth is carefully noted, and from it a horoscope is made. This astrological record, called a ***sada,*** was traditionally inscribed on palm leaves by the ***bedin saya*** (astrologer). The sada is considered a valuable possession which must be kept secret from strangers, who might otherwise be able to cast a spell on the person if the details of his or her birth were known. The horoscope will show what heavenly influences will be operative at the various stages of a person's life, thus serving as a prediction of future good and bad times.

Just as a person's day of birth determines which names he or she may receive, so too is it thought to influence that person's character. For example, those born on Monday tend to be jealous; while those born on Tuesday are considered honest. From this it is possible to predict whether or not two people are likely to be able to get along and even if they will make good marriage partners. For example, a match between a woman born on Monday and a man born on Thursday is thought to be compatible whereas trouble would surely result if they had been born on a Thursday and a Saturday.

Chinthes (mythical creatures that guard pagodas)

Each day of the week is also associated with an animal symbol. The planet, character trait, and animal sign associated with each day of the week is represented in the following diagram. The compass points in the middle of the diagram represent the directions with which each planet is associated (see the section on the Shwedagon Pagoda in chapter three, Religion, for more information).

Wednesday (noon - midnight) (mythical planet) Short-tempered Tuskless elephant	Friday Venus Talkative Guinea pig, mole	Sunday Sun Miserly Galon (mythical bird)
Thursday Jupiter Mild Rat	**NW N NE** **W** **E** **SW S SE**	Monday Moon Jealous Tiger
Saturday Saturn Quarrelsome Naga (serpent)	Wednesday (until noon) Mercury Short tempered Tusked Elephant	Tuesday Mars Honest Lion

An astrologer may be called to make a horoscope for a baby soon after its birth, or the family may wait until the child is three or four years old. In either instance the exact time of birth is always recorded immediately after delivery.

Astrology is also used to calculate auspicious days to undertake momentous events such as the selection of a marriage date or the day on which to begin a new business or set out on a long journey. Even the time and date for the official declaration of independence of the country, (4 January 1948, at 4:20 a.m.) were chosen for their astrological significance.

Marriage:

Traditionally, marriage in Burma has been arranged in several ways. The young couple may be paired off by their parents in an "arranged" marriage. Alternatively, they may first be introduced to each other by a matchmaker (known as the ***aungthwe***), usually acting on behalf of their parents. However it is also possible that a young couple simply decide for themselves that they wish to get married. In practice, all methods usually involve parental assent along with some degree of control by the potential couple. The question of which party holds the greatest veto power may vary according to the disposition of the individuals involved. Normally children will feel a great deal of respect for the wishes of their parents, and will not wish to challenge their decisions. Naturally the parents will also hope to make a good match for their children, though the individual compatibility of the couple is not the only concern: character, status, wealth, and background are, as in many cultures around the world, also considered important.

Young people have the opportunity to socialize at festivals, at chance meetings in the marketplace, or during the all-night ***pwe*** dramas that are held in celebration of some significant event. This presents the young men and women with the opportunity to choose a suitable partner, after which hints are made to the respective sets of parents, who then must discuss the matter and give their approval. Sometimes a matchmaker may be called in to arrange the initial meeting of two people who are thought to be compatible, and if all works out well the couple may decide to get married. Thus the concept of an "arranged marriage" may not actually be as onerous as many in the West might think. Should a determined young couple decide to marry despite parental disapproval, they may choose to elope, and the parents usually have little choice but to accept the match and welcome the newlyweds back to their home.

The wedding ceremony is a social affair. It does not involve any religious ritual, nor does it take place at a religious site such as a pagoda or temple. Astrological calculations are important in determining an auspicious date and time for the wedding, but this has no connection with the teachings of Buddhism. As a general rule, marriages should not take place during the three months of Buddhist Lent. Other restrictions on suitable dates depend on the individual horoscopes of the young couple.

The marriage rite often involves the couple eating together from the same dish, symbolizing their intent to form a single household. Relatives and friends are invited to the celebration, gifts are given, and a ***pwe***, (drama) is often held for everyone's entertainment. No ring is exchanged, and the woman does not assume any part of her husband's name.

Should a marriage not succeed, it is possible to seek a divorce. Women have an equal status with men in this respect. Women may initiate divorce proceedings and they are assured of retaining possession of all of the personal property that they brought into the marriage, as well as a share of jointly acquired property.

Burmese Festivals:

The numerous festivals that occur throughout the year provide a welcome opportunity for everyone to put aside their cares and to enjoy themselves. It is a chance to meet old friends, to catch up on local news and gossip, or, for the younger adults, to try to catch the eye of that someone special. The major festivals, often celebrated on nights of the full moon, typically attract crowds from far and wide. A carnival atmosphere prevails, with food stalls sprouting up to satisfy everyone's desire for a late night snack. Traditional performances of ***pwe,*** which may take the form of plays, opera, or puppet plays, begin in the evening and may last until dawn.

Two relatively new holidays are held early in the year: Independence Day is celebrated on January 4, while Union Day occurs on February 12. At around the same time the traditional ***Htamane*** harvest festival is held. This festival is celebrated at the time of the new moon during the Burmese month of Tabodwe (corresponding roughly to the month of February) just after the rice crop has been harvested. The main preparation for the event involves cooking large containers of ***htamane***, a special dish made from glutinous rice. The freshly harvested rice must be winnowed and cleaned. The rice is soaked in water and then added to a large pot containing

oil and ginger. Meanwhile, young boys split open coconuts, fortify themselves with the water contained inside, and grate the meat of the coconut, which is added to the pot. The girls will shell peanuts and add it to the mixture, which by now has become very thick and hard to stir. As the boys try to show off their strength stirring the rice mixture with broad wooden paddles, the girls will get ready for the final step, which consists of sprinkling in sesame seeds. The whole family is involved in the procedure and all will enjoy the fruits of their labor, though only after a portion has been reserved to be given as alms to the monks of the community.

Thingyan, or New Year, comes around the middle of April according to the Burmese calendar. Since this is one of the hottest times of the year, it is only fitting that it is celebrated by dousing everyone in sight with buckets of water. While there is a religious element to the occasion (images of the Buddha are bathed and the monks are given special alms), most people seem to look forward to it as a joyous escape from the heat and a chance for fun. Little boys arm themselves with traditional water pistols consisting of a hollow tube with a sliding plunger at one end and a nozzle at the other. Older children and young adults use more drastic methods, employing hoses, buckets, water-filled balloons and any other means that they can devise. No one is safe from the deluge, and everyone accepts the soaking in the spirit of good fun.

The ***Thingyan*** festival lasts for three days, and is also the time of year when ***Thagyamin***, the King of Nats, is thought to descend to earth from the heavens. Children are reminded that ***Thagyamin*** records the names of those who have been good in a gold-bound book, while the names of all those who have been bad go into a ledger bound in dog-skin. With this in mind, people try to make amends for any wrong-doings in the past year by engaging in especially good

behavior and charitable acts. The exuberant use of water is also a symbolic way to wash away past misdeeds and start the new year fresh.

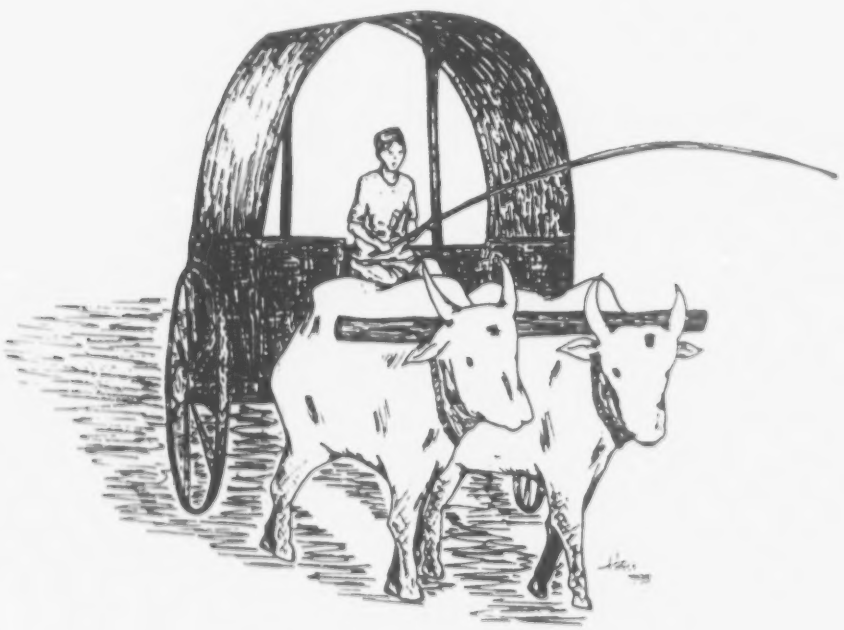
Water also features prominently in the ***Kason*** festival. However at this time it is used to water the bo tree, which is type of tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The full moon day of the month of ***Kason*** (April/May) is recognized as the day on which the Buddha was born. It is also considered to be the day on which he attained enlightenment and, later, on which he died. For this reason it is referred to as the "thrice blessed day." People carry pots of water on their way to the pagoda to water the sacred bo tree. The procession is often accompanied by musicians playing drums, cymbals, and flutes.

What is often known as the Buddhist Lent period begins on the full moon day of Waso (June/July) in commemoration of the day on which the Buddha gave his first sermon some 2,500 years ago. The Lent season marks a three month period during which people are expected to be more reflective and restrained in their behavior. No festivals or marriages are planned during this time and many people will also avoid moving to a new house. Young boys planning to undergo their initiation (***shinbyu***) into the monkhood often schedule their stay in the monastery to begin at this time.

The Lent period ends in the month of Thadingyut (September/October) with a festival of lights symbolizing the lights of the angels guiding the Buddha's return from heaven to earth. Oil lamps, candles, and lanterns are seen everywhere. People make the rounds to visit relatives and friends with gifts of food. For three nights the joyous occasion is celebrated with music, lights, and entertainment. At Inle Lake the event is celebrated with special enthusiasm, and can last for

more than two weeks. Aside from the customary street stalls and the musical and dramatic performances, the end-of-Lent celebration at Inle Lake becomes all the more magical for the thousands of tiny lanterns that are floated onto the lake at night.

Another festival of lights occurs during the month of Tazaungmon (November). By the light of the full moon a weaving competition is held among the unmarried girls of the town. They will work all night at their looms, vying to complete the best set of robes for donation to the monks. By dawn the competition is over and the results of their labors are handed over to the nearby monastery.



Burmese Ox Cart

Burmese Music and Drama:

The Burmese ***pwe*** is a dramatic performance that is the heart of the entertainment found at festivals, wedding celebrations, and other special occasions. There are several different kind of pwe, though most forms share many of the same general characteristics. Performances typically last for many hours, though members of the audience may move around, chat with neighbors, or get up in search of food or drink at various times without seeming to interrupt the performance. Because the shows are typically performed outside, people can come and go as they wish, usually showing up for the dramatic parts when the hero makes his dashing first appearance or when the heroine cries in distress at some grave misfortune. People arrive early with mats to stake out their seating area, and will often bring tea and snacks with which to fortify themselves throughout the all-night performance. Vendors take the opportunity to sell refreshments to those who forgot to bring their own food and drinks, and a festive atmosphere prevails.

The ***zat pwe*** are based on well-known folk tales, most of which are derived from Indian tradition. Common themes are the Ramayana story (a widely performed drama throughout much of Southeast Asia involving Prince Rama, who, with the help of Hanuman the Monkey King, rescues his wife Sita after she has been abducted by an evil demon) or the Jataka tales (stories of previous incarnations of the Buddha). Live music accompanies the performers, who act and sing and dance their parts with great energy.

The ***anyein pwe*** also includes song and dance, but often adds in a large dose of slapstick comedy. Clowns make the audience laugh not only from their outrageous behavior but also from their puns and wordplay. Jokes are made about real-life people and current events. The anyein pwe generally has fewer actors than the more elaborate zat pwe, and often only lasts four or five hours instead of the all-night marathons described above.

Yein pwe consists of pure dance performed by an ensemble. In another form of pwe the main actors are not people at all but puppets. The ***yokthe pwe*** is performed by a master puppeteer who controls a cast of some two dozen marionettes. These marionettes, measuring two or three feet in height, are hand-carved and painted, and are manipulated with the aid twenty or more strings attached to a single puppet. The puppeteer provides the narrative and the dialogue for all the parts. It takes great skill to control the movement and the speech of all the puppets, and these days this type of drama is seldom seen.

The musical accompaniment of the pwe may include a number of different instruments. An ensemble typically consists of a bamboo flute, a kind of oboe, and a set of percussion instruments. Among these is the ***pat-waing***, a set of tuned drums suspended from a circular wooden frame. The musician sit in the center of the frame and is surrounded by the drums, which must continually be kept in tune with the application a paste made from rice-husk and ash. The same type of circular wooden frame is also used for the ***kyi-waing***, which supports a set of gongs. Other instruments include drums of various sizes, cymbals, and bamboo clappers.

Another frequently used musical instrument is the harp. This instrument, unlike most others in Burma, is usually played by women. The body of the harp is shaped somewhat like a

boat, with a long neck curving up and over one end. Their graceful appearance makes these harps popular as souvenir items.

Burma's Cultural Heritage

Most of the information contained in this chapter has focused on elements of traditional Burmese culture that have persisted up to the present time. Because of the relatively unchanging nature of the Burmese village, it is possible to take descriptions made during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and imagine them as reasonable approximations of what village life was like in earlier times. While major changes occurred in the ruling classes because of dynastic struggle or war with neighboring kingdoms, the pattern of life among the villagers remained relatively unchanged. People tried to stay away as much as possible from the political turmoil of the court, for as the Burmese proverb says, "When the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled."

For the majority of people, life centered around the rhythm of the seasons. The monsoon rains arrived year after year to determine the time for planting and harvesting of the life-giving rice grains. Every day saffron-robed monks would go around the village with their begging bowls. ***U-bok-nay*** ("duty days") occurred four times each lunar month. During duty days families would go to the pagodas to make offerings, and would observe all ten Buddhist precepts instead of the usual five. (Normally all Buddhists are expected to refrain from killing any living thing, from stealing, from lying, from committing adultery, and from drinking alcohol. The additional five precepts observed on religious occasions are to refrain from all of the following: eating after midday; singing, dancing, or making music; beautifying oneself with make-up;

wearing jewelry; and sitting or standing in an elevated place, i.e. which is meant to avoid putting oneself in a higher position [literally] than a monk.)

Children would undergo a special ceremony to mark their entry into the adult world. For the sons of the family this would mean performing the ***shinbyu*** rite and joining the monastery. For the daughters, the equivalent coming-of-age event is the ***natwin,*** or ear-piercing ceremony. When a girl is about twelve or thirteen, an auspicious date is chosen and the young girl is dressed up in all her finery to have her ears are pierced with a golden needle. After this ceremony the daughter would be expected to act like less like a carefree little girl and more like a young woman. This may entail greater attention to her appearance, and doubtless would include mastery of the art of making and applying the ***thanakha*** (face powder) that is commonly used in Burma. ***Thanakha*** is the bark of the *linnoria acidissima* tree, but varieties of sandalwood and other trees are also used in the same way. The bark is ground to a paste with water and applied to the face to dry. Its astringent properties are matched by its refreshing and cooling characteristics, making it the universal make-up of Burmese women. It is still common to see women with white or yellow patches of the powder adorning the forehead and the cheeks.

Both the shinbyu and the natwin would be celebrated with feasts and performances of ***pwe***. Traditional festivals would present the opportunity to socialize, to see relatives, and to eat special foods. Religious events, relating both to Buddhism and to nat-worship, punctuate the calendar, and remind the people of their duties in life. The cycle of life continues, as each generation adds its own interpretation to the underlying constant features of the culture.

Student Activities

I Multiple Choice.

1) Burmese names

(a) always begin with a family name (surname)

(b) can never be changed by the individual

(c) generally are chosen so the first letter matches those associated with the day of the week on which the person was born

(d) usually consist of a combination of religious names and home names

2) A common term of address to be used to show respect for an older Burmese man is

(a) Maung

(b) U

(c) Ma

(d) Daw

3) In Burmese astrology, each day of the week is associated with all of the following **except**

(a) a planet

(b) a personality trait

(c) an animal

(d) a color

4) Traditional Burmese marriages generally involve all of the following **except**

(a) a ***pwe*** held after the marriage

(b) a religious ceremony conducted by monks

(c) astrological calculations to choose the marriage date

(d) invitations to relatives and friends to attend the celebration

5) ***Thingyan***, or Burmese New Year, involves

(a) cooking large pots of ***htamane***

(b) throwing water at everyone

(c) celebration of the Buddha's birthday

(d) weaving robes for the monks

6) All the following are true about the Buddhist "Lent" period **except**

(a) marriages are generally not held during this period

(b) the Lent period lasts for three months

(c) the end of the Lent is celebrated with a festival of lights

(d) weekly ***pwe*** performances are held at the monastery throughout the Lent period

7) Different varieties of ***pwe*** performances may specialize in one of the following ***except***

(a) pure dance

(b) puppetry

(c) singing and acting

(d) poetry recitation

8) When Burmese girls are ready to make the transition to the world of adults they undergo the _____ ceremony.

(a) shinbyu

(b) natwin

(c) thanakha

(d) u-bok-nay

9) On "duty days" Burmese Buddhists would normally

(a) fast the entire day

(b) perform dances for the ancestors

(c) observe all 10 precepts of Buddhism

(d) sponsor a pwe performance

10) Thanakha is a kind of

(a) medicine

(b) make-up

(c) drink

(d) ceremony

II True or False

1) T F The term "Maung is applied to young women.

2) T F Burmese women always adopt their husband's name.

3) T F A ***bwe*** is a religious name adopted by someone entering a monastery.

4) T F In traditional Burmese society, one way to introduce two people as possible marriage partners was through the service of an ***aungthwe***.

5) T F Marriages are generally not scheduled to occur during the Buddhist Lent period.

6) T F The traditional ***pwe*** is performed much like a Western concert, with people taking assigned seating in an auditorium according to their tickets and sitting quietly throughout a one or two hour performance.

7) T F The ***yokthe pwe*** involves the use of puppets that are 2 to 3 feet high.

8) T F The Burmese harp, like most other Burmese instruments, is always played by men.

9) T F Divorce is never allowed unless the husband requests it.

10) T F All Buddhists are expected never to 1) kill any living thing; 2) steal; 3) lie; 4) commit adultery; or 5) drink alcohol

III Essay Topic

How do Burmese holidays and festivals compare to those in America? Are there any holidays that are similar between the two countries? Are there any common themes or elements that link different Burmese holidays?

IV Class Discussion

If you could choose between using the American system of terms of address (Mr., Miss, Mrs., Ms.) of the Burmese system (Maung, Ko, U, Ma, Daw, Me), which would you prefer everyone to use? Why?

CHAPTER FIVE

BURMA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The three most prominent nationalists of early Burmese independence -- Aung San, U Nu, and Ne Win -- started as young activist "thakins" in pre-independence Burma and went on to lead their country towards modernization. Each leader presided over a distinct phase of Burma's modern history. Aung San carried out the drive towards Burmese independence until his death in 1947. For the first 14 years of independence, from 1948 to 1962, U Nu led the country and tried to implement his vision of a unified Burma. During this phase Burma passed through many turbulent times. The problem of maintaining Burmese unity became so serious that Ne Win seized the reins of government in 1962 and imposed a military-controlled regime. All three leaders faced the same fundamental challenge: how to transform the central region ("Burma Proper") and the border areas into a single, prosperous, unified nation. Each leader championed his own particular solution.

The major tasks faced by Aung San's successors were many, but there were three that seemed especially important at the dawn of Burma's independence. The first was the promotion and maintenance of national unity. This was a difficult task, since many of the minority ethnic groups were less than enthusiastic about being forced to join a country that they felt was dominated by the Burmans. The Shan, Karenni (later called Kayah), and Kachin states had to be given the right to succeed from the country after ten years. The second task was the formation of a national ideology that would respect the central place of Buddhism in Burmese social life

without destroying the freedom of other citizens who did not adhere to this religion. This matter was somewhat related to the first problem, since most of the non-Buddhists belonged to ethnic minorities. The third task was the modernization of the Burmese economy, a difficult feat for a country devastated by war.

The Search For Unity

The ethnic distinction between the Burman majority occupying Burma Proper and the various ethnic groups inhabiting the border areas -- Shans, Karens, Mons, Kachins, etc. -- has always been a feature of Burmese society. This distinction became even more serious during the colonial period because the British adopted separate policies for "Burma Proper" and for the so-called border areas. To bring the two parts together under an independent Burmese state was the goal of two major conferences held at Panglong. The first Panglong Conference was held in March 1946; the second one in February 1947. In both conferences Aung San persuaded the minorities that the proposed independent Burmese nation would respect the rights of every citizen.

As a result of these negotiations at Panglong, the membership of the Constituent Assembly accommodated the interests of the minorities. The final draft of the constitution provided for a bicameral or two-house parliamentary system. The upper house, called the Chamber of Nationalities, had 125 members, 72 (or over 50%) of whom were non-Burmans.

The lower house, named the House of Deputies, had representatives elected according to the population size of the districts. Obviously Burmans predominated in the lower house because of their greater population size in many districts. The prime minister was nominated by the Chamber of Deputies. The President of the Union enjoyed mostly ceremonial powers as head of state. The player who really wielded power in the new nation was the prime minister.

Very soon after Burma became independent on January 4, 1948, prime minister U Nu began to face serious problems threatening the young nation and its new government. The country was in danger of disintegration because the ruling party, the AFPFL coalition, was splitting into several quarreling factions. The first faction to break away was that of the Red Flag communists, who established their base in the Arakan state. Another rebel faction, the Mujahadin or Muslim rebels, tried to set up their own independent Islamic state in northern Arakan. The White Flag communists also rebelled and directed anti-government attacks from their base in the Pegu region. These multiple rebellions were serious: at one time the White Flag communists had close to 25,000 rebels opposing the central government.

To add to U Nu's troubles, part of the armed component of the AFPFL broke away and attacked the government. Then the Karens demanded their own territory and formed an armed group, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), which was able to capture several major cities. Due to the combined effect of all these rebellions, the government was sometimes only in control of less than half of the country.

The only troops left to defend the U Nu government were the loyalist Yellow Band faction of the AFPFL, some Kachin and Chin troops, and the Fourth Burma Rifles under the

command of General Ne Win. Through the determined collaboration between U Nu as Prime Minister and General Ne Win as Commander in Chief, the beleaguered government somehow survived and eventually gained the upper hand in these series of rebellions. These two leaders organized thousands of loyalist citizens into "peace guerrillas" to supplement the depleted Burmese armed forces. After the various rebel forces were pushed back or defeated, a period of relative stability returned to Burma and the government could attend to the task of economic modernization.

Foreign Relations

The Yunnan corridor, which had been a bone of contention between the French and the British in the early years of colonialism, once more surfaced as an issue. This occurred because remnants of the Chinese nationalist army, who were driven out of China by the communists, retreated to Southeast Asia via this Yunnan-Burma Road. These Chinese Irregular Forces or CIF took refuge in the borderlands of northern Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos. Here they posed a threat to the stability of these countries because they were technically "outlaws" beyond the legal control of the governments whose territories they occupied. At one time the CIF were supported by foreign governments, but as these sources of support dwindled, the CIF obtained funds from the illegal production and export of drugs, particularly opium.

Burma did not want the CIF forces within its borders and was concerned that their presence would cause relations with China to deteriorate. Ever since the forces of Kublai Khan devastated the ancient kingdom of Pagan, China had been seen by the Burmese as a potential threat. In 1956 Chinese troops crossed the border into the Kachin and Shan states. U Nu continued to hold a series of negotiations with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and was eventually able to resolve the border disputes and arrive at a peaceful settlement. Burma was careful to maintain good relations with China.

In other foreign policy issues Burma adopted a neutral stand. The country steadfastly refused to be a partisan in super-power politics, and favored neither side in the Cold War. In 1955 U Nu attended the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia. This conference was an important step in forming the Non-Aligned Movement, which Burma helped found. Burma remained an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement until 1979, when it protested the pro-Soviet orientation of the Non-Aligned Summit Conference being held in Cuba.

From Civilian to Military Rule

During the ten years (1948-1958) between the proclamation of independence and the installation of an interim caretaker government, U Nu tried to modernize Burma's economy. He used democratic means to push economic programs, balancing the conflicting interests of many factions within parliament, the military establishment, and religious organizations, and especially

the rival factions within AFPFL. Party politics became seriously divisive as many political factions appeared With so many conflicting interests, the goal of economic progress became difficult to achieve.

On the eve of the general elections of 1956, the AFPFL faced serious opposition from the National United Front. Although the AFPFL won, the National United Front gained 48 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Some time after the elections U Nu proposed changes to the structure and goals of the AFPFL. Not all members agreed to these changes and the proposals lead to a split in the party.

The political turbulence that resulted from the break up of the AFPFL contributed to U Nu's decision to appoint General Ne Win as head of a caretaker government. The latter's main task was to restore public order and ensure the normal operations of government offices, enterprises, and services. With characteristic military discipline, General Ne Win organized the Defense Services Institute to take over the management of state-owned companies involved in commerce and industry. The Institute improved efficiency in banks, factories, shipping, and other forms of transportation. The caretaker government also succeeded in curtailing some of the powers enjoyed by traditional Shan and Kayah chiefs, powers which the government perceived as posing danger to the unity of Burma.

In 1960 General Ne Win decided to step down as head of the caretaker government to allow free elections and thus return political power to civilian control. The two major parties contesting the election were rival factions of the AFPFL. U Nu's faction, which was renamed the Pyidaungsu Party, won on the strength of two points: (1) the recognition of Buddhism as the state

religion for Burma; and (2) the renegotiation of the agreements with the minorities in the border areas.

Both of these were volatile issues. U Nu himself was a devout Buddhist who had emulated King Mindon (sponsor of the Fifth Buddhist Council at Mandalay in 1871) by convening the Sixth World Buddhist Council in 1954-1956. He also ordered the use of government and AFPFL funds to build the Kaba Aye (World Peace) Pagoda and the Pasana Guha (Great Sacred Cave) in Rangoon. U Nu sponsored an amendment to the constitution recognizing Buddhism as the state religion. To reassure the protection of Burma's non-Buddhists, another amendment was soon passed guaranteed the rights of all those following minority religions. Both of these amendments sparked protests.

The question of ethnic minorities was equally divisive. Some states were considering exercising their constitutional right to withdraw from the union, and U Nu negotiated with their leaders to persuade them to remain a part of Burma. Amidst these trying conditions U Nu found it difficult to keep the support of his party. As he continued to lose popularity, U Nu resigned as president of the Pyidaungsu Party. Economic conditions remained poor as the country seemed unable to resolve its political and social problems.

Decisive action came from the hands of General Ne Win. He led a military coup d'etat in 1962, barely two years after he had stepped down as head of the previous caretaker government. Now he returned to power apparently determined to preserve the Union of Burma and speed up the modernization of the country. He ordered U Nu arrested for his failure to carry out the task of modernizing Burma under a socialist ideology. He also quickly suspended the 1947

constitution and dissolved parliament. In its place he created a Revolutionary Council, staffed by military officers, to administer Burma. With the support of the Revolutionary Council, General Ne Win assumed total control of the country -- Burma was now ruled by a military dictatorship.

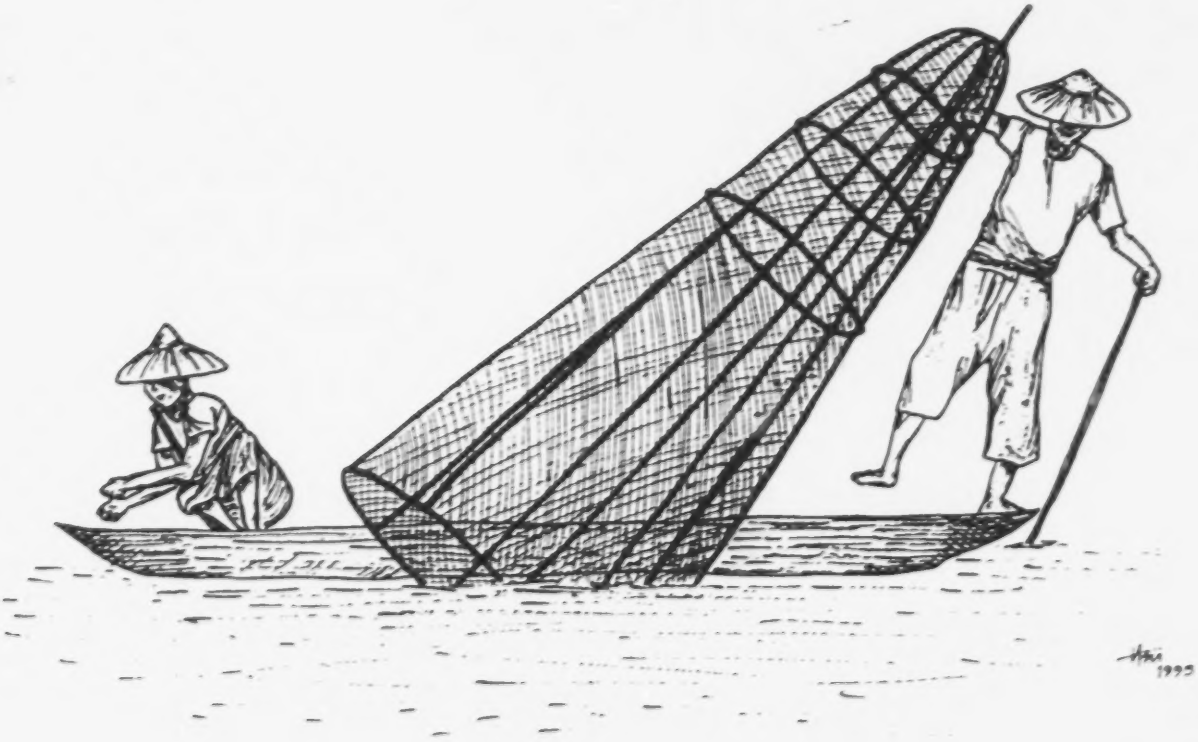
With this military government, Burma entered the third phase of its modern history. Burma was still led by one of the former "thakins" who had been active in the independence movement. General Ne Win at one time shared the vision of Aung San and U Nu to make Burma a united and prosperous country. Sadly, the next three decades of military rule in Burma would fall far short of achieving this goal.

To make his national philosophy known to the people, General Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council published a major document entitled "The Burmese Way to Socialism." The primary goal of the nation, he announced, was the creation of a socialist economy. He complained that the previous parliamentary democracy had failed to serve socialist development.

The Revolutionary Council published a second important policy document, entitled "Declaration of the Conviction of the Revolutionary Council on the Question of Union Nationalities." It addressed the festering issue of the relationship between "Burma Proper" and the border areas. The new policy limited the autonomy of all non-Burman ethnic groups to such non-political areas as language and literature, national customs, religion and the arts.

Soon after martial law was imposed, the Revolutionary Council invited ethnic and communist insurgent groups to discuss peace with the central government. During the latter half of 1963, several representatives of insurgent organizations came to the capital. They included delegates from the Red and White communists as well as from groups representing the Karen,

Kayah, Mon, Kachin, Chin, and Shan minorities. The meetings started well but eventually broke down. After the talks some of the rebel groups resumed their armed opposition to the government. The government continued to have problems with demands for autonomy from groups in the border regions.



Fishermen in Northern Burma

Economic Development and the Military

One major obstacle to improving Burma's economy was the unequal distribution of land, a legacy from the colonial period. Many of the Indian money-lenders, the Chettiars, had become absentee landlords when they fled back to India during the war to escape from the Japanese. The Japanese allowed the peasants to repossess these abandoned lands in Lower Burma. Under U Nu the issues of absentee landlords again surfaced as an issue, because land reform and the nationalization of industries were basic to socialist economic programs.

U Nu and the elected leaders passed the Land Nationalization Act of October 1948, transferring landholdings of absentee landlords to the state, though the was not fully carried out due to the unrest of the ongoing rebellions. The U Nu government also nationalized key elements in industry, transportation, and trade. Though oil companies were not nationalized, they were forced to enter into joint ventures with the government.

Burma's economic situation began to deteriorate, partly due to the weakness of the world market and partly due to the Burmese government's socialist approach to economic development. Burma's economy did not recover quickly from the damage it sustained during World War II. Production of important revenue-generating items such as rice, oil, and teak were all down compared to their pre-war performance.

It was at this point that U Nu began to have second thoughts about his socialist assumptions and began encouraging private sector participation. This slight shift in the basic economic policy alarmed some members of the military who were totally committed to the

socialist theory of economic development. It was partly this difference in economic policy that prompted General Ne Win to launch a coup d'etat and impose a military government.

Under Ne Win's military rule, total nationalization of the economy was carried out. The protection of farmers was a top priority to the military administrators. A law was passed in 1963 to prohibit the seizure of farms or animals because of nonpayment of debts. Rent levels were frozen; they could be paid either in cash or in kind. The Tenancy Act was later amended, abolishing rents for farm land. The Revolutionary Council set up the Union of Burma Agricultural Marketing Board to coordinate the buying and exporting of rice.

Reforms in agriculture were matched by reforms in industry through nationalization. The Revolutionary Council passed the Enterprise Nationalization Law warning that all large enterprise would be taken under state control by March 1, 1963. In the next ten years close to 15,000 enterprises were taken over by the government. The big industries, some owned by foreigners, were among the first to come under state control. Among those taken over was the Burma Oil Company, which earlier had been exempted during the U Nu administration. On February 1963 foreign and domestic banks were also nationalized.

All these nationalization attempts in agriculture and industry were justified by the government's professed desire to prevent exploitation and to insure equal distribution of wealth. The results, however, proved to be discouraging. As economic growth slowed down and as the population increased, there were fewer goods and services to go around. Prices rose. Even farmers, who had been favored by the government, responded negatively to the fixed prices offered for their produce. Productivity fell, as there was little incentive to produce large crops.

They hid the best rice from government buyers and sold it in the black market where they got better prices. The poor-quality rice exported by government-owned companies found few overseas markets and produced only low profits.

In 1971, nine years after the imposition of military rule, the government initiated major changes in economic policies. Ironically these changes towards free enterprise were more drastic than the proposals for which U Nu had been deposed by the military. The government was now prepared to abandon Soviet-style rapid industrialization, and shift the emphasis to agriculture, consumer goods, and mining. The earlier neutralist policy of not accepting foreign aid was abandoned; the leadership now recommended acceptance of limited economic assistance.

The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma

In October 1973 the military-backed Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) held its Second Congress and approved a new constitution. It was ratified through referendum in December 1973, and publicly promulgated on January 3, 1974. The Revolutionary Council dissolved itself on March 2, 1974, and transferred its powers to the elected ***Pyithu Hluttaw***, or People's Assembly. General Ne Win, who had earlier resigned his military commission together with 20 other military officers, became president of the new Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.

Unlike the old constitution, the new one recognizes only a unicameral or single-house parliament, whose members are elected every four years. The only official party was the BSPP: all other political parties were abolished. At the national level, the country was to be administered through the State Council and the Council of Ministers. Lower level local government issues were dealt with through people's councils operating at the three main levels of administration: state or division, township, and village. The minority issues associated with border areas led to a regional reorganization. The national government recognized regional components labeled "division" for Burma Proper, and "state" for the border areas. There were now seven divisions and seven states. The states included both the original three states created at independence and the new Karen, Chin, Rakhine [Arakan], and Mon States.

A lingering problem for the government was the modernization of the Burmese economy and its relation to the world economy. In 1976, the World Bank formed the Burma Aid Group which included sympathetic members such as the Asian Development Bank, Japan, some Western nations, and other lending agencies. Increased aid to Burma was promised, provided its socialist economic system was overhauled. In 1977 the socialist economist U Ba Nyuein and 40 of his colleagues were forced to resign from the Central Committee. Through this gesture the BSPP acknowledged the need to make changes. In 1977 the legislature passed "the Right of Private Enterprise Law." The government announced that it was now willing to attract foreign investors and encourage foreign companies to develop joint ventures with Burmese companies.

Continuing Turbulence

The modernization of Burma has by no means been an easy one. If there was serious political turbulence in the early years of Burma under U Nu, in which the Union of Burma was under threat of dissolution, the period under Ne Win and his successor appears even more discouraging. Bloody military repression and the suppression of political activism of civilians, students, and monks are sad chapters in the recent history of Burma.

Military dictatorship became constitutional dictatorship when Ne Win became President under the new constitution of 1974. Within three months after his inauguration, riots broke out over food shortages. The BSPP responded to these disturbances by reorganizing itself. The percentage of military members within BSPP was increased, reducing civilian participation. This effectively re-militarized the party and the government which the party controlled. The earlier willingness to accept foreign investment was revoked in favor of socialist economics. In 1981 Ne Win announced his intention to resign from the office of President on account of health; but he remained the leader of the BSPP party. In 1987 Ne Win publicly admitted past failures and faults in his efforts to lead the modernization of Burma's economy, especially in the state control of foodstuffs.

Public dissatisfaction with the government was growing. After many years of following the military's "Burmese Way to Socialism," the nation's economy was still in deep trouble. In 1987 Burma humiliatingly had to accept its UN-declared status as one of the world's Least Developed Countries. In the same year the government suddenly proclaimed large denomination

paper money worthless. An estimated 80% of the Burmese currency was thus declared unusable. With the bulk of their savings suddenly swept away, people were naturally extremely upset. The country seemed ready to erupt. When a tea shop scuffle resulted in police intervention and the death of a student, the stage was set for a wave of violence. Students protested the killing but many were herded up by security police. In one horrifying incident 41 students suffocated to death in the stifling heat of a police wagon into which they had been jammed.

A series of strikes and further demonstrations followed. These anti-government protests were also brutally suppressed by the army. Pro-democracy supporters claim that hundreds died at the hands of the military and police, though the official government figures were far lower. However the situation was bad enough for Ne Win to announce his resignation as BSPP Chairman. He suggested that a referendum be held to allow multi-party elections, but the BSPP rejected this because it would lose its privilege of being the only political party in Burma.

Replacing Ne Win as Chairperson of BSPP was U Sein Lwin, also known as the "Butcher of Burma" for his harsh repression of demonstrators. In one incident in Rangoon, it has been claimed that between 2,000 and 3,000 unarmed demonstrators were massacred. U Sein Lwin used his influence to become state President, but he was so unpopular that he only held the office for 17 days. His replacement was a more moderate person, Dr. Maung Maung, a former Attorney-General. The latter ended martial law and allowed the formation of political parties.

An opposition party emerged, known as the National United Front for Democracy, later renamed the National League for Democracy (NLD). Among the leaders of NLD was Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the famous independence hero Aung San. People soon rallied around Aung

San Suu Kyi, captivated by her oratorical skills, her brave pro-democracy stance in defiance of the military regime and the great reverence with which people still regarded her father. Other leaders of the movement included General Tin U (former Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense) and Brigadier-General Aung Gyi.

On September 18, 1988, General Saw Maung seized power from the Maung Maung administration. He continued the suppression of all protests and demonstrations. Foreign journalist were not allowed to visit the country. He created a new ruling body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), composed exclusively of military officers, with himself as chairman. SLORC assumed all the power of the Pyithu Hluttaw (the legislature), the State Council, and the Council of Ministers. It promised to hold multi-party election on May 27, 1990. In the meantime the military placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for leading a demonstration and disqualified her from participating in the election. It also found cause to remove other leaders of the NLD.

In spite of these harassments, the NLD won the 1990 multi-party general elections by a landslide, winning 396 of the 485 contested seats. To protect its own hold on power, SLORC did not recognize this mandate for change and refused to allow any transfer of power. This led to more public demonstration and more cruel suppression. Even the monks became actively involved by withholding their services to the members of the military. The situation was also gaining worldwide attention: this was heightened when Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

On April 23, 1992 SLORC announced the resignation of its chairman, General Saw Maung. He was replaced by Army Chief of Staff, General Than Shwe, who was later named Prime Minister. Another new leader was Major-General Khin Nyunt, Secretary General of SLORC and head of the intelligence service.

The new leaders authorized the release of many political prisoners. However the NLD was still prevented from gaining political supremacy. NLD leaders that posed a threat to the government were arrested. In April 1993 Brigadier-General Aung Gyi, part of the NLD leadership, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Burma's future will depend on who will finally prevail in this struggle for power between the military successors of Ne Win and the pro-democracy movement. It seems clear in 1997 that the current government does not hold the support of the majority of the people. Unrest is still visible among the student activists, the minorities in the border areas, and the ordinary Burmese villagers who are tired of being "trampled like grass."

STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

I Comprehension: Fill in the blanks.

1) The first prime minister of Burma was _____.

2) Of the three nationalist leaders who led post-war Burma, the one who introduced military rule was _____ _____.

3) Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is daughter of the well known nationalist leader _____.

4) When U Nu left the government temporarily, he appointed _____ in charge of the interim government.

5) In 1987 the United Nations put Burma on the list of _____.

6) Aung San Suu Kyi's party is known by the initials _____.

7) Under the 1974 constitution, Burma was divided into seven _____ and seven _____.

8) Under military rule most major industries in Burma were _____ by the government.

9) During his time in office U Nu made _____ the official state religion.

10) Burma's foreign policy of neutrality was symbolized for many years by its membership in the _____, which it helped found after the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955.

II Class Discussion

Since Burma became an independent country again in 1948, it has been troubled by ethnic groups calling for greater autonomy or complete independence from Burma. Should these separatist groups be allowed to break away and form their own countries? What are the advantages and disadvantages of trying to retain a united Burma?

III Essay Question

Summarize Burma's struggle with issues of democracy from its independence to the present.

IV Class Debate

"Because of the poor economy and the instability caused by separatist groups, General Ne Win did the right thing in 1962 to take over power and to try to restore order to the country."

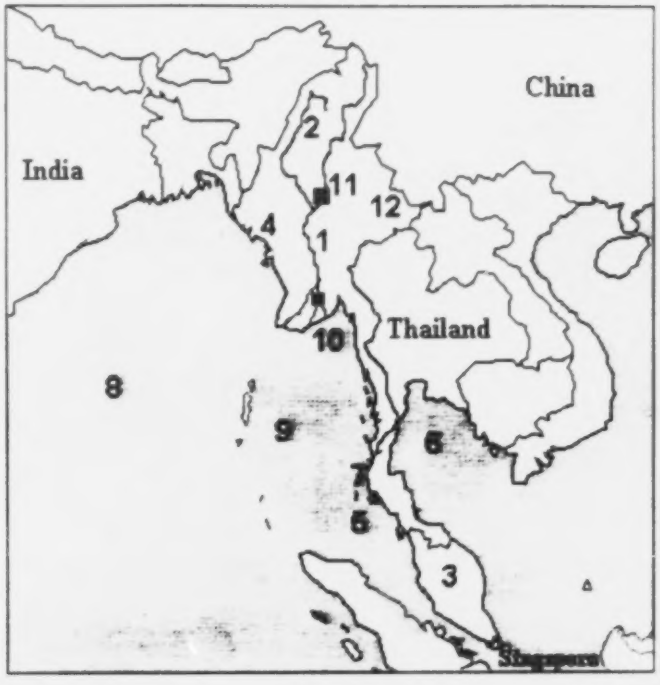
Divide the class into those for and against this statement and debate the issues.

Key to Exercises

CHAPTER ONE

I. Map Study:

Locate and label the following geographic features.



1. Irrawaddy River
2. Chindwin River
3. Malay Peninsula
4. Arakan State
5. Mergui Archipelago
6. Gulf of Siam
7. Tenasserim Coast
8. Bay of Bengal
9. Andaman Sea
10. Rangoon (city)
11. Mandalay (city)
12. Shan Plateau

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II. Multiple Choice: Choose the correct answer

1. Burma is situated in
   (d) Southeast Asia

2. The main river that flows through Central Burma is
   (c) Irrawaddy River

3. The western border of Burma is closest to
   (a) India

4. The most productive wet-rice agriculture is found in
   (b) the delta region

5. The population of Burma is
   (c) about 43 million

6. The total area of Burma is about
   (b) 261,000 square miles

7. The major ethnic group of Burma is
   (b) the Burmans

8. Burma is well known as an exporter of this tropical hardwood:
   (b) teak

9. Which of the following countries does **not** share a border with Burma?
   (d) Vietnam

10. Compared with pre-war levels, Burma's current rice exports are
    (a) substantially smaller

III Fill in the Blanks

1. Burma lies within Mainland Southeast Asia, while some of its more distant neighbors, such as Indonesia, lie within Island Southeast Asia.

2. Much of Burma's agriculture relies on water provided by the major river systems, which include the Irrawaddy river and its tributary, the Chindwin river of central and northwestern Burma.

3. Burma's capital, Rangoon, lies on one of the eight branches of the Irrawaddy that form Lower Burma's delta region.

4. The Mons are related to the Khmer ethnic group of Cambodia.

5. The Shan of Burma call themselves the Tai.

6. The main religion of Burma is Buddhism.

7. One of the main centers of Burmese gemstone production is Mogok.

8. The eastern part of the upper Malay peninsula belongs to Thailand, while the western part, known as the Tenasserim coast, belongs to Burma.

9. The two neighbors on Burma's western border are India and Bangladesh.

10. Some upland communities practice swidden, also known as slash and burn agriculture.

CHAPTER TWO

I Fill in the blanks.

1. Pagan, an early center of Burmese culture, was attacked by the forces of Kublai Khan in the late 13th century.

2. Thailand, a country bordering Burma that was formerly known as Siam, has been invaded by the armies of several Burmese kings.

3. King Alaungpaya captured this city, site of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, and named it Rangoon (Yangon), which means "end of strife."

4. The 1826 Treaty of Yandabo, in which Burma gave up control of the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts, concluded the First Anglo-Burmese War.

5. Independent Burma was proclaimed on October 17, 1948.

6. Representing Burma at the proclamation of Burmese independence was U Nu.

7. Conspicuously absent from the Burmese independence proclamation was Aung San, the architect of Burmese independence who was killed four months prior to the occasion.

8. The three nationalist leaders who led the drive to modernize Burma were Aung San, U Nu, and Ne Win.

9. The Burmese term "thakin" which is similar to the Indian "sahib" may be translated as "master".

10. The Indian money-lenders in Burma were called Chettiars.

II Multiple Choice: Circle the letter of the correct answer for each question.

1. A famous early king of the Toungoo dynasty was
   (b) Tabinshwehti

2. The Pagan kingdom was a center of power for the
   (c) Burmans

3. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War, this Burmese king became an active proponent of Buddhism and initiated many reform measures to modernize Burma.
   (a) Mindon Min

4. The opening up of new agricultural land in the delta region of Lower Burma attracted many farmers from Upper Burma who
   (b) often borrowed money to help begin rice cultivation

5. The growing social inequality in agriculture was only part of a larger pyramid of inequality. Which of the following statements does not truly reflect the situation in Burma.
   (d) many Burmese technocrats shared power with the British

6. The Indian immigrant population in Lower Burma had grown from 297,000 in 1901 to over half a million by the 1930's (10% of the total population of the delta region). They occupied about
   (d) 50% of government jobs

7. The "shoe question" during the period of social activism referred to
   (b) going barefooted when entering pagodas

8. The Saya San rebellion
   (b) was started by a former monk

9. Aung San and U Nu were dismissed from the university
   (b) for publishing an article in the student newspaper

10. The student strikers defended themselves by occupying the
   (b) the Shwedagon Pagoda

CHAPTER THREE

I Multiple Choice.

1) Buddhism originated in
(a) India

2) The variety of Buddhism practiced in Burma is called
(b) Theravada

3) Which of the following acts would **not** bring merit:
(c) killing mosquitoes that disturb the concentration of meditating monks

4) Among Burmese Buddhists, the percentage of males who enter the monastery at some time in their lives is:
(d) almost 100%

5) The Buddhist monkhood is known as the
(b) sangha

6) Which of the following is **not** true about the Shwedagon Pagoda:
(b) the pagoda was built in 1871 by King Mindon

7) Nats are best described as
(c) spirits

8) Burmese belief in Nats is best characterized as
(c) an animist tradition that has evolved to co-exist successfully with Buddhism

9) The king who brought Theravada Buddhism to the court at Pagan was
(a) Anawrahta

10) All of the following religions can easily be found in Burma **except**
(c) Shintoism

II Fill in the Blanks.

1) Siddartha Gautama later became known as the Buddha.

2) Many Buddhists seek to gain merit so that they will be reborn in a higher position in their next life.

3) The ceremony marking a boy's entrance to the monkhood is known as the shinbyu.

4) The Shwedagon Pagoda is said to have hair relics that belonged to the Buddha.

5) In earlier times most Burmese boys learned to read and write while in the monastery.

6) A coconut was often tied to a Burmese house as an offering to Min Mahagiri, the house nat.

7) Many Burmese kings and queens are represented in a special group of nats known as the Thirty-Seven Nats.

8) Most followers of Islam and Hinduism in Burma today are those whose families came from India or Bangladesh.

9) Buddhist monks leave the monastery every day carrying a begging bowl with which they receive gifts of food.

10) The Buddha taught people to avoid extremes of indulgence and of self-denial: because of this he is said to have advocated a "Middle Way" as the path to enlightenment.

CHAPTER FOUR

I Multiple Choice.

1) Burmese names
(c) generally are chosen so the first letter matches those associated with the day of the week on which the person was born

2) A common term of address to be used to show respect for an older Burmese man is
(b) U

3) In Burmese astrology, each day of the week is associated with all of the following **except**
(d) a color

4) Traditional Burmese marriages generally involve all of the following **except**
(b) a religious ceremony conducted by monks

5) ***Thingyan***, or Burmese New Year, involves
(b) throwing water at everyone

6) All the following are true about the Buddhist "Lent" period **except**
(d) weekly ***pwe*** performances are held at the monastery throughout the Lent period

7) Different varieties of ***pwe*** performances may specialize in one of the following ***except***
(d) poetry recitation

8) When Burmese girls are ready to make the transition to the world of adults they undergo the _____ ceremony.
(b) natwin

9) On "duty days" Burmese Buddhists would normally
(c) observe all 10 precepts of Buddhism

10) Thanakha is a kind of
(b) make-up

II True or False

1) F The term "Maung is applied to young women.

2) F Burmese women always adopt their husband's name.

3) T A ***bwe*** is a religious name adopted by someone entering a monastery.

4) T In traditional Burmese society, one way to introduce two people as possible marriage partners was through the service of an ***aungthwe***.

5) T Marriages are generally not scheduled to occur during the Buddhist Lent period.

6) F The traditional ***pwe*** is performed much like a Western concert, with people taking assigned seating in an auditorium according to their tickets and sitting quietly throughout a one or two hour performance.

7) T The ***yokthe pwe*** involves the use of puppets that are 2 to 3 feet high.

8) F The Burmese harp, like most other Burmese instruments, is always played by men.

9) F Divorce is never allowed unless the husband requests it.

10) T All Buddhists are expected never to 1) kill any living thing; 2) steal; 3) lie; 4) commit adultery; or 5) drink alcohol

CHAPTER FIVE

I Comprehension: Fill in the blanks.

1) The first prime minister of Burma was U Nu.

2) Of the three nationalist leaders who led post-war Burma, the one who introduced military rule was Ne Win.

3) Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is daughter of the well known nationalist leader Aung San.

4) When U Nu left the government temporarily, he appointed Ne Win in charge of the interim government.

5) In 1987 the United Nations put Burma on the list of Least Developed Countries.

6) Aung San Suu Kyi's party is known by the initials NDP.

7) Under the 1974 constitution, Burma was divided into seven states and seven divisions.

8) Under military rule most major industries in Burma were nationalized by the government.

9) During his time in office U Nu made Buddhism the official state religion.

10) Burma's foreign policy of neutrality was symbolized for many years by its membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, which it helped found after the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955.

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